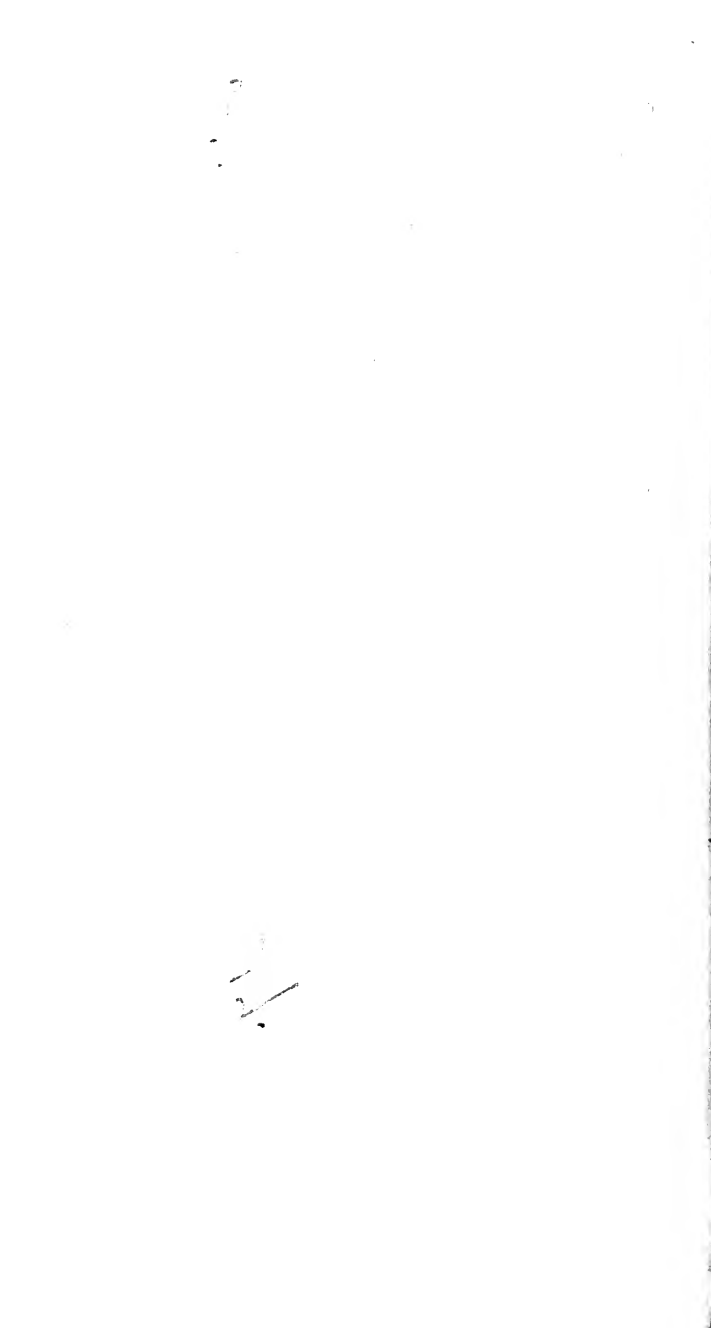




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SKETCHES OF SERMONS
ON THE
PARABLES AND MIRACLES
OF CHRIST.



SKETCHES OF SERMONS

ON THE

PARABLES AND MIRACLES

OF CHRIST:

THE ESSENTIALS OF SAVING RELIGION. &c.

BY JABEZ BURNS, D.D.

AUTHOR OF

"PULPIT CYCLOPEDIA," "FOUR HUNDRED SKETCHES AND 'SKELETONS OF SERMONS,'" "SKETCHES OF SERMONS ON TYPES AND METAPHORS," ON "SPECIAL OCCASIONS," "CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY," "CHRISTIAN'S DAILY PORTION," "MOTHERS OF THE WISE AND GOOD," "SERMONS FOR FAMILY READING," "PREACHER'S POCKET COMPANION," ETC., ETC., ETC.

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CONTENTS.

SKETCHES ON THE PARABLES OF CHRIST.

	Page
Christ's Parabolical Mode of Teaching (Matt. xiii. 34)	9
The Wise and Foolish Builders (Matt. vii. 24—27)	13
The Sower (Matt. xiii. 3—9)	16
The Wheat and Tares (Matt. xiii. 24)	20
The Grain of Mustard Seed (Matt. 31, 32)	24
The Leaven (Matt. xiii. 33)	27
The Hidden Treasure (Matt. xiii. 44)	31
Spiritual Vegetation (Mark iv. 26—29)	35

	Page.
The Two Sons (Matt. xxi. 28—31)	38
The Debtors (Matt. xviii. 23—25)	42
The Net (Matt. xiii. 47—50)	45
The Day Labourers (Matt. xx. 1—15)	49
The Lost Sheep (Luke xv. 3—7)	52
The Prodigal Son (Luke xv. 11—16)	56
The Prodigal Son (Luke xv. 17—20)	[Sketch II.] 59
The Prodigal Son (Luke xv. 20—32)	[Sketch III.] 63
The Unprofitable Servant (Luke xvii. 7—10)	67
The Great Supper (Luke xiv. 16—24)	70
The Wicked Husbandman (Matt. xxi. 33—43)	74
The Pearl of Great Price (Matt. xiii. 45, 46)	77
The Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matt. xxv. 1—13)	80
The Talents (Matt. xxv. 14—30)	84
The Unjust Steward (Luke xvi. 1—8)	87
The Rich Fool (Luke xii. 16—21)	91
The Barren Fig Tree (Luke xiii. 6—9)	94
Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke xvi. 19—22)	99
Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke xvi. 23—31)	[Sketch II.] 102
The Unjust Judge (Luke xviii. 1—8)	105
The Pharisee and Publican (Luke xviii. 10—14)	109
The Good Samaritan (Luke x. 30—37)	113
The Merciful Creditor (Luke vii. 40—42)	117
The Good Shepherd (John x. 11—18)	121
The Good Shepherd (John x. 1—18)	[Sketch II.] 125

SKETCHES ON THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST.

The Miraculous Power of Christ (Acts ii. 22)	129
Marriage of Cana (John ii. 1—11)	133
Miracles performed in Galilee (Matt. iv. 23, 24)	136
Restoring of the Paralytic (Matt. ix. 1—8)	140
Casting out the Dumb Spirit (Mark ix. 17—27)	144
The Loaves and Fishes (Matt. xiv. 15—21)	148
Bethesda Pool, etc. (John v. 2—9)	152

Page.

Healing of the Nobleman's Son (John iv. 46—54)	155
The Leper Cleansed (Matt. viii. 1—4)	159
The Restored Demoniacs (Matt. viii. 28—34)	163
The Two Blind Men (Matt. xx. 29—34)	167
The Dumb Spirit Cast Out (Matt. ix. 33—33)	171
The Expulsion of the Unclean Spirit (Luke iv. 33—37)	174
The Centurion's Servant (Luke vii. 1—10)	178
Restoring of the Blind Young Man (John ix. 1—7)	182
Cure of the Deaf Man (Mark vii. 32)	185
Christ's Power over the Winds and the Sea (Matt. viii. 23-27)	183
Restoration of the Withered Hand (Matt. xii. 10—11)	192
Recovery of Jairus' Daughter (Matt. ix. 18)	195
Restoration of the Widow's Son (Luke vii. 11—17)	198
Death of Lazarus, the Friend of Christ (John xi. 11)	202
Christ weeping at the Grave of Lazarus (John xi. 35)	206
Resurrection of Lazarus (John xi. 36—46)	209
The Ten Lepers (Luke xvii. 17)	212
Healing of Malchus's Ear (Matt. xxvi. 51—54)	216
Miracles accompanying the Crucifixion (Matt. xxvii. 45—51)	220

MISCELLANEOUS SKETCHES.

The Proud Abased and the Lowly Exalted (Gal. i. 15—16)	229
All Christians should work for God (Mark xiii. 34)	233
The Great Feast (Isa. xxv. 6—8)	236
Messiah's Triumphs (Psalm cxxxii. 18)	239
Praises of the Living (Isa. xxxviii. 19)	243
Faith of the Samaritans (John iv. 39—42)	246
Blessedness of the Christian Sabbath (John xix. 21)	250
Ruinous Effects of Sin (Proverbs xiii. 6)	253
The Waters of Marah (Exodus xv. 54—45)	257
Saving Religion, Spiritual in its Nature (1 Peter ii. 5)	260
Saving Religion, a Religion of Faith (Rom. iv. 16)	264
Saving Religion, a Religion of Love (1 John iv. 16)	269
Saving Religion, a Religion of Obedience (John xiv. 21)	273

	Page.
Saving Religion, a Religion of Self-Denial (Mark viii. 34)	277
Saving Religion, a Religion of Prayer (Rom. xii. 12)	281
The Pre-eminence of Charity (1 Cor. xiii. 13)	286
Jude's Prayer for the Saints (Jude 2)	291
Faults Remembered (Gen. xli. 9)	314
The Christian a New Creature (2 Cor. v. 7)	302
The Charge against the Church at Ephesus (Rev. ii. 4)	295
God's Presence, the security of the Church (Psalms xlvi. 5)	298
The Sentence of Death (Jer. xxviii. 16)	306
Remembrance of Christ (Solomon's Song i. 4)	310

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No. I.

CHRIST'S PARABOLICAL MODE OF TEACHING.

“All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables: and without a parable spake he not unto them.”—*Matt. xiii. 34.*

IN eastern countries from the earliest ages instruction has been extensively communicated through the medium of parables. It is the favourite mode of diffusing knowledge among Oriental nations at the present day. One of the earliest parables on scripture record is that of Jotham, in which the trees are represented as seeking to anoint a king over them, Judges ix. 8. Another ancient parable is that of Jehoash, wherein the thistle is described as seeking a matrimonial alliance with the cedar: see 2 Kings xiv. 9. There is also that of Tekoah, 2 Sam. xiv. 5., and that of Nathan, in which he brought the sin of David before his eyes, and caused the indignant monarch to pass sentence upon himself, must be well remembered by all. It is difficult to decide whether Solomon's vivid description of old age and its infirmities, Eccles. xii. 2, is to be viewed as a parable or allegorical description. Our attention, however, at present, is directed to the parables of the Saviour. So greatly did Christ adopt this mode of instruction, that it is affirmed in the text, “without a parable spake he not unto them.” The passage does not design to assert absolutely that he never taught in any other way, but that this was the common, almost the unvarying practice of the great Teacher. Let us then,

I. ESTABLISH THE TRUTH OF THE TEXT. And

II. ASSIGN SOME REASONS FOR THE MODE OF INSTRUCTION THE SAVIOUR ADOPTED.

I. ESTABLISH THE TRUTH OF THE TEXT. The Saviour's ministry did not extend much, if any, beyond the period of three years. There can be no doubt that the chief themes and topics of his instruction, though in a very condensed form, have been transmitted to us in the writings of the evangelists. Now, these parables form a chief indeed a great proportion of the Saviour's teaching.

(1.) In some cases parables were the basis of other doctrinal and practical addresses, as in the parables of the sower, and many others.

(2.) In other instances the parable constituted the application of the discourse just delivered, as in the parable of the foolish and wise builders, which was the conclusion of his sermon on the mount.

(3.) But from their number and variety, it is obvious to the ordinary reader of the New Testament scriptures, that the Saviour seldom spake to the people without embodying in parabolical costume, his divine instructions.

(4.) In some of the Saviour's discourses we have a series of parables, as in the chapter of which the text forms a part. For here we have the parable of the sower—of the wheat and tares—grain of mustard seed—of the leaven—hidden treasure—of the net—and the pearl of great price. So profusely rich was the Saviour's blessed discourse on this occasion, that we do not marvel that it should be said, "without a parable spake he not unto them." Let us,

II. ASSIGN SOME REASONS FOR THE MODE OF INSTRUCTION WHICH THE SAVIOUR ADOPTED. We might remark, that it accorded with the habits and mental characteristics of the people, and that it harmonized with great portions of their Holy Scriptures. But we observe,

1. *That it rendered great and sublime subjects easy to be understood.* Of all themes, Christ's were the most lofty and exalted. He had to do with subjects difficult of apprehension to the human mind. His topics were spiritual, heavenly,

eternal. By parables, he brought these truths down to the capacities of the people. They could not fail to ascertain the mind and design of the speaker, and the import of his subject. Hence the common people, the illiterate, the mass, heard him gladly. No marvel that the peasantry hung on his sacred lips with wonder, reverence, and admiration. Now this should ever be the chief object of the preacher's attention—the people must understand, or how can they possibly profit?

2. *By parables, subjects were rendered pleasing to the mind.* Figurative illustrations, and metaphorical analogies, are gratifying to most minds. Abstract principles, presented in an abstract form, would attract the careful attention of but a few of mankind. But to see these themes clothed in parabolical costume, was sure to delight the great majority of the Saviour's hearers. To interest our hearers, is generally essential to their profit. And the Saviour's hearers were often so charmed, that for hours they listened to him with gladness and delight. On one occasion he wrought a splendid miracle to supply the people with food who had followed him, and hearkened to his discourses until evening had come. Matt. xiv. 14.

5. *By teaching in parables he obtained a more candid hearing from his auditories.* Many of the Saviour's sermons were intended to convey keen rebukes for sin and faithful warnings to those who were deceiving themselves. In many cases a direct charge would have at once excited their prejudices and wrath. By parables, therefore, the bitter potion was so administered, that those who were condemned by the discourse must have admired the mode in which the reproof was given, or the threatening denounced. Besides, it was thus more difficult to reject the counsel of the Saviour against themselves.

4. *By parables the Saviour often won the attention of his hearers.* Many of the Saviour's parables were

adapted to excite and captivate the best emotions of the heart. Such, for instance, as the parable of the joyous shepherd rejoicing over the recovered wanderer from the fold. Such also as the clement lord who so freely forgave the debt of his servant. Such also as the mercy and goodness of the father who so ardently received back again his prodigal son.

5. *The parables of the Saviour were easily remembered and retained.* The natural imagery in which they were clothed was always before them. The fishermen could not forget the parable of the net. Nor the housewife those of the leaven,—or the lost piece of silver,—or the husbandman those of the vineyard,—of the sower,—or of the tares. To be benefited by what we hear, it must be retained and stored up in the chambers of the memory.

6. *By parabolical teaching the Saviour shewed the great aim of his ministry.* It was not to perplex the ignorant, or to triumph over the partially instructed, or to exhibit himself as an object for learned admiration, but it was evident he desired their improvement—their enlightenment—their spiritual and eternal profit. He shewed the deepest concern for their well-being, and made it evident that he laboured for their present and everlasting salvation. How desirable to make this manifest in all our discourses. To convince our hearers that we seek only their profit, that they may be saved.

APPLICATION.

1. How sweet and gracious the character of Christ as a teacher.
2. What a model for ministerial imitation.
3. Let us profit by his blessed discourses which are contained in the scriptures of the New Testament.

Here we can listen to the Saviour and receive his life-giving and soul-saving words. And surely the words of his mouth are better unto us than thousands of gold and silver.

No. II.

THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS.

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock,” &c.—*Matt.* vii. 24-27

THE Redeemer had just finished his inimitable Sermon on the Mount. He had been opening in a comprehensive and distinct manner the spiritual nature of his kingdom and the true practical character of saving religion. His auditory had doubtless listened with fixed attention, but he knowing their hearts perceived that many would be satisfied with hearing, without obeying the truths which they had heard.

He therefore concluded his address with the parable of the builders, which could not fail to remind his hearers that the great end of his teaching was the practical improvement of those who listened to his words. Observe,

I. WHAT IS COMMENDABLE EVEN IN THE CONDUCT OF THE FOOLISH BUILDER.

II. THOSE THINGS WHICH HE NEGLECTED AS CONTRASTED WITH THE WISE BUILDER. And

III. THE FINAL RESULTS IN REFERENCE TO BOTH. Observe,

I. WHAT IS COMMENDABLE EVEN IN THE FOOLISH BUILDER. (1.) He was not a neglecter of religious things altogether.

(2.) He heard the sayings of the great teacher: ver. 26.

(3.) It is clear also that he heard with sufficient attention to understand.

(4.) He was also greatly influenced by what he heard.

(5.) He felt the importance of making provision for the future. Of building a house to protect himself from the inclemency of the approaching season.

(6.) He actually selected a site, commenced the building, and stayed not, until it was finished.

(7.) There is nothing said disparagingly respecting the external appearance of the house. He expended sufficient time and toil in its erection.

It is obvious that the foolish builder, in plain terms, heard, understood, was interested, and was greatly influenced by the teaching of the Saviour, and all these were features worthy of commendation. But observe,

II. THOSE THINGS WHICH HE NEGLECTED AS CONTRASTED WITH THE WISE BUILDER. He did not

1. *Duly calculate the trials his house would have to endure.* He thought only of the present and fine weather. He was solicitous only for its present convenience and comfort. Palestine as a land of hills and brooks was peculiarly liable to inundations, and hence it was of the utmost importance to select a site sheltered from the storm, and where the base would not suffer from the teeming rain. Many are satisfied with the present forms of religion, they feel their need of nothing more, and they neglect to prepare for times of temptation, afflictions, and death. They reckon not on the solemn concerns of judgment and eternity. He did not

2. *Select a sure and safe foundation.* The sand, in the dry season, might appear solid and firm; but who that knew its fragile texture, its moveable character, would select it for a foundation. The wise builder knew the value of a firm, immovable basis, and selected the hard unyielding rock. That which wind could not scatter, nor waves remove. The sandy foundation may represent,

(1.) Our own righteousness, in opposition to the sacrifice and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2.) Or the union of our works with those of the Redeemer, as the ground of our hopes.

(3.) Or the mere assumption of the name and forms of religion, without an acquaintance with its spirit and power.

(4.) Or the public profession of religion, without regard to a practical obedience to the Saviour. The rock on which the wise man built, is the Lord Jesus Christ. The elect, precious, sure, and immutable foundation, which God has laid in Zion. To build on this foundation implies,

(1.) A knowledge of Christ's character, person, offices, and work.

(2.) A rejection of all things else as the basis of hope. "God forbid that I should glory," &c. "Yea doubtless and I count all things but loss," &c.

(3.) An implicit resting of the soul on Christ for pardon, acceptance, and eternal life. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." "Other foundation can no man lay," &c.

(4.) Believing, conformity, and obedience to Christ's authority. Not only hearing, but doing the things which he commandeth. Observe,

III. THE RESULTS IN REFERENCE TO BOTH BUILDERS.

The foolish builder,

1. *Experienced storms which he had not anticipated.* He had thought only of summer, and its sunshine and calm. He had not prudently calculated on approaching winter, with its winds and tempests. But alas! these all came. "The rain descended," &c. So affliction, death, and judgment, will try every man's work.

2. *He was overwhelmed in ruin which he had not feared.* It is briefly recorded of his house, "that it fell." Its basis was swept away, and nothing was left to sustain it. Hence it became one heap of ruins. Its beauteous form, its elevated walls, its commodious rooms, were all lost in one utter desolation. So must it be with every kind of religion which rests not on Christ Jesus.

3. *The builder perished with the vain fabric he had reared.* Hence it is recorded, "And great was the fall of it." Infatuated expectations and ærial prospects were all swept away, and the ruin of the builder was entire,—irremediable, and eternal. Of the wise builder it is recorded,

1. *That his house also was tried by the storm, ver. 25.* No exemption even to pure, sincere, and evangelical piety, from the trials and afflictions of life, the solemnities of death, or the decisions of the judgment day. "Every man's work shall be tried with fire." "God will judge every man," &c.

2. *But his hopes were fully realized.* His house withstood the fury of the blast. The rains fell, and the winds blew upon his house in vain. "It fell not." Blessed, joyous, declaration for the builder. He was sheltered, happy, and secure. His expectations were not cut off, but his so 's desire was granted. "He knew whom he had believed," &c. "An abundant entrance was administered," &c. Learn,

1. The wisdom of experimental true piety.

2. The peculiar character of evangelical religion. Christ the basis.

3. The folly of all other schemes to save the perishing sinner.

No. III.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

"And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold a sower went forth to sow : And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up &c."—*Matt.* xiii. 3, 9.

THE Saviour had been delivering a series of pious and faithful admonitions, and had also confirmed his divine mis-

sion by healing one who had been possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb, chap. xii, 22. The Jews under a spirit of infatuation and unbelief, attributed his miraculous power to Beelzebub, the prince of devils. He therefore reasoned with them on the gross improbability, that Satan would help to destroy his own kingdom, ver. 25, 26. He then warned them against the fearful sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; and shewed how important it was to have the heart in a right state: for only from a good heart, could the treasure of good things be produced, ver. 35.

Some of the Scribes and Pharisees then sought a sign, on which Jesus referred them to that of the prophet Jonah, and declared that the men of Nineveh should rise to condemn that generation. After he had concluded these and other discourses, the same day he went and sat by the sea side, and as great multitudes were gathered together to hear him, He addressed to them the parable of the sower. There can be no doubt that he had before his mind the various characters who had listened to his previous discourses, with the different results which had followed his labours. Observe,

I. THE SOWER. The Lord Jesus Christ as the great teacher,—the divine apostle of the gospel. Under Christ, all ministers of the blessed word,

(1.) Whom he hath called by his spirit.

(2.) Qualified by graces and talents. And,

(3.) Sent forth by opening for them a sphere of usefulness. “An open and effectual door.”

The ministerial sower must be

(1.) Judicious. Selecting appropriate seasons and places for his work.

(2.) Diligent. Labouring as one who must give an account.

(3.) Persevering. Instant in season, and out of season.

(4.) Devoted. Yielding himself heartily, entirely, and sincerely to these things.

SKETCH III.

What wisdom, grace and courage are necessary to the faithful minister of Jesus Christ ! Notice,

II. THE SEED. The seed is the word of God. As such,

1. *It is heavenly and divine.* Isaiah lv. 10, 11.

2. *Living and incorruptible.* 1 Peter i. 23.

3. *Powerful and soul saving.* Rom. i. 16, and x. 17.

4. *And immutable and everlasting.* "But the word of our God shall stand for ever." Is. xl. 8. Observe,

III. THE VARIOUS KINDS OF GROUND INTO WHICH IT WAS CAST. Some fell,

1. *By the way side.* These were unenlightened hearers. It took not root. And was speedily devoured by the fowls. Satan by his temptations, and the world by its vanities, and the heart with its sinful tendencies, prevented any good resulting from it. Some seed fell,

2. *In stony places.* Where there was only a shallow layer of earth, and beneath which, was hard, unimpressible rock. Such are all *superficial* hearers. They listen with, eagerness, and seem to receive it with joy ; but alas ! "their goodness is but as the morning cloud," &c. Some other events speedily erase the impressions of the word ; or by and by some offence is taken, and they walk no more in the company of the pious. Some fell,

3. *Among thorns.* Where the ground had not been prepared for the reception of the seed. Indeed, where it was fully pre-occupied. These are *worldly hearers*, whose thoughts and desires are so engrossed with the concerns of the body and time—with earth and earthly things, that they can give no fixed attention to the great realities of the soul and eternity. "The cares of this world," how they harass, and perplex, and disturb. "Deceitful riches," how they beguile, ensnare, and destroy ! Observe, some fell,

4. *Into good ground.* Those whose hearts were prepared and open to receive it. These were the *practical* hearers. They heard to purpose and profit. They heard so as to

understand, retain, and yield a return to the sower. Notice of the good ground hearers,

5. *The varied amount of increase yielded.* They all yielded fruit, and abundantly. But the difference is striking. Some gave back thirty fold, a fair return. Others sixty, as much more as the former: while others gave a hundred fold, a return, striking and wonderful. Let each hearer strive not only to be fruitful, but to abound therein to the glory of God.

IV. THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION TO WHICH OUR ATTENTION IS DIRECTED. "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." Let all hearers of the word consider,

1. *The indispensable characteristics of profitable hearing.* These should be (1.) Devotional preparation. God's blessing should be sought both on our own hearts, and on the ministering of the word.

(2.) Serious watchfulness, that the mind be not dissipated. That all wanderings of heart are avoided.

(3.) With candid attention: desiring to hear the truth with an ingenuous mind.

(4.) In the spirit of believing obedience. To receive it as the word of God, and not as the word of man. To receive it with holy resolution,—to practise what is heard. "Doers of the word, and not hearers only."

(5.) With humble reliance on God's blessing. That the word may be spirit and life to the soul. Let all hearers of the word consider,

2. *The advantages resulting from the right hearing of the word.* It will be followed,

(1.) By an increase of divine knowledge, "The entrance of God's word giveth light."

(2.) By its sanctifying influence on the heart. "Sanctify them by thy truth," &c.

(3.) By the gracious consolations it imparts. Producing peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

(4.) By its preserving power over the life. Counselling in perplexity. Keeping the feet from sliding from God's paths. Cleansing the way, &c. See Psa. cxix. 9, 11, &c. Acts xx. 32. "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up," &c.

Learn,

(1.) The greatness of the privilege of those who hear the gospel.

(2.) Their individual responsibility for improving those privileges.

(3.) And the awful doom of those who hear to no profit. Heb. iii. 4.

No. IV.

THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES.

"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field," &c.—*Matt.* xiii. 24, &c.

It is of great importance carefully to observe the Saviour's interpretation of his own parables. For the want of this, the utmost confusion and contradiction have arisen in reference to the one under consideration. Most commentators have interpreted this parable as if it had been descriptive of the church, and not of the world. The Redeemer emphatically explains it as referring to the world. He says, in his concise, yet clear elucidation of it, "The field is the world," &c. It is obvious that this should be kept in view throughout the whole parable, and in harmony with this declaration must the whole be expounded. Observe the field—the sowers—the fruit—the recommendation—the decision, and the consummation. Observe,

I. THE FIELD. "The field is the world." That is, the

whole earth. Including all men, of all ages, and dispensations. The world may be contemplated,

1. *As a field of great extent.* Including the habitable globe. All nations, and people, and tongues.

2. *As a field densely populated.* Probably containing a thousand millions of human, immortal beings.

3. *As a field of improvement.* Where men have numerous mercies, and means, and privileges. The light, and the sunshine, and the shower. The early and the latter rain.

4. *As a field of probation.* Where men are candidates on trial for immortality. Stewards who must give an account. Labourers for the day of life, &c.

5. *As a field of peril.* The temptations and snares innumerable. A world under the usurpation of the prince of darkness. Satan's seat. A world of wiles and dangers. Where sin in all its treacherous arts is spread abroad to the imminent risk and peril of souls. "Satan goeth about." Evil in various forms prevailing, &c. Notice,

II. THE SOWERS. We are referred,

1. *To the Son of Man.* He sowed the good seed,—the wheat. He made man upright. Created him in his own likeness, &c. Planted within him holy principles, good desires, &c. We are referred,

2. *To Satan as the enemy.* He sowed the tares.—the evil seed. By tares is probably meant darnel, or rye grass, which had a close resemblance to wheat, and was not easily distinguished till near maturity. By this we are to understand the introduction of evil into the hearts of men by the temptations of the devil. Now here we see distinctly purity and good flowing from God, and depravity and evil from the prince of darkness. Notice then,

III. THE FRUIT: ver. 26. The field was soon seen to be productive both of wheat and tares, of evil and of good. This has been the condition of the world ever since the fall.

In the first family were Cain and Abel, and through all generations there have been the seed of the evil one, as well as the children of God. Everywhere is presented to the eye of the contemplatist the ignorant and the wise,—the vicious and the good,—the vile and the holy,—the enemies and the loyal subjects of God. There has been no exception to this in any age, or country, in our world's history. This mixture every where prevails. Never forget that the good and holy are of God, but the evil of the devil. The enemy sowed the tares. Why God allowed it, is not for us to determine, but there can be no doubt he will overrule it for the manifestation of his divine glory. Observe,

IV. THE RECOMMENDATION. “The servants said, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?” ver. 28. This recommendation seems quite natural,—wherefore allow the soil to be cumbered,—the tares to remain? Is it not better and safer for to separate the evil from the good? (1.) How often would men advise thus, who only first contemplate the present, and whose minds do not take in the future.

(2.) How often would men advise thus, who only consult their own feelings of indignation against evil.

(3.) How the mass of men have acted thus in making sanguinary laws, by which criminals have been revengefully and hastily thrust out of life, as not fit to live. But does this accord with the wise benevolent administrations of heaven? Let the text answer the question, for notice,

V. THE DECISION OF THE PROPRIETOR. But he said, “Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them:” ver. 29. This shows us,

1. *That to discriminate between good and bad men is not always an easy matter.* The best men are so frail, so liable to err and to fall into sin, that probably thousands whom God has accepted, men would have rejected. Some unconverted men have had so many amiable and lovely features, that men would have pronounced them pious, where God has

seen no change of heart, and no evangelical reformation of character. To judge of heart and state, is God's prerogative, and let not fallible men invade it.

2. *God has his own purposes to accomplish in allowing the wicked to live.* He thus exhibits his own clemency and long-suffering. He thus gives space for repentance. He thus renders the ungodly excuseless.

3. *He often overrules the actions of evil men for his own glory.* They are often "His sword." His instrumentality for carrying out his designs. At any rate he says, "Let both grow together," &c. Notice then,

VI. THE CONSUMMATION. "And in the time of harvest," &c. &c. Observe,

1. *The harvest is the end of the world.* A predicted—certain—and awful event. A day which is approaching—doomsday. The day of the world's conflagration. See 2 Peter iii. 7, &c.

2. *Angels will be the administrators of the divine judgments.* This has often been so. It will be so then. See Rev. xiv. 15, &c. Matt. xxv. 31. 2 Thess. i. 7, &c.

3. *The doom of the wicked will be fearful.* "Cast into the furnace of fire," &c. ver. 42. Rev. xx. 11, &c.

4. *The destination of the righteous will be glorious.* "Then shall the righteous shine forth," &c. v. 43. Theirs will be a state of exaltation and blessedness for ever. He shall say unto them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father," &c. Matt. xxv. 34.

APPLICATION.

"Who hath ears to hear, let him hear," ver. 43.

How instructive and solemn the whole subject. Are we the wheat, or the tares? What is to be our future our eternal state?

No. V.

THE PARABLE OF THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED.

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.”—*Matt.* xiii. 31, 32.

THE text contains another of those parables which refer to the vegetable kingdom, and with which the rural auditory of Christ were intimately acquainted. He had led his hearers to contemplate the sower, casting his seed abroad, with the various results arising from the ground on which it fell. He had expatiated on the field which had produced both the wheat and tares, and he now wishes to present unto them an emblem of the origin, progress, and consummation of his spiritual kingdom. He therefore selects the mustard tree, refers to the smallness of its seed, and shows how it analogously describes that gracious administration he had come to set up in the world.

The parable strikingly exhibits the smallness of the origin—the greatness of the progress—and the glorious magnitude of his kingdom. Observe,

I. THE SMALLNESS OF THE ORIGIN OF THE SAVIOUR'S KINGDOM. “The kingdom of heaven, or the gracious spiritual reign of the Messiah, is like to a grain of mustard seed,” “which is indeed the smallest of all seeds,” ver. 31, 32.

In how many points of light is this capable of illustration? Look

1. *At the birthplace of the Saviour.* Bethlehem. Not Jerusalem, Matt. ii. 1, &c.

2. *Consider the parentage of the Jews.* A carpenter his reputed father. A poor virgin his real mother.

3. *The circumstances of his birth.* How obscure and humiliating—born in a stable—laid in a manger. No room for the King of kings in the inn.

4. *Notice the commencement of his ministry.* At Nazareth. In comparative privacy. No parade or show connected with it.

5. *See the character of his disciples and the officers of his kingdom.* Fishermen. Tax gatherers, &c. None of the rulers or the great. His friends obscure, illiterate, poor.

6. *The paucity of his followers and adherents.* During any period of his life. At his apprehension. At his death. At his resurrection. When he ascended. They all met in an upper room in Jerusalem. Without learning. Wealth or influence. How apposite the metaphor: scarcely discernible as the small grain of mustard! But notice,

II. THE GREATNESS OF ITS PROGRESS. The ideas in the text indicate progress—rapid, increasing progress. Observe,

1. *The rapid extension of the gospel and kingdom of Christ.* In Jerusalem, the city of Christ's death. In Samaria, &c. Through the then known world. So that forty years after Christ's death, the cross of Christ waved in triumph in Corinth, Athens, Antioch, Rome, &c. Myriads had been converted. Of Jews and Gentile idolaters. Of the learned and illiterate. Of the rich and the poor, &c. This progress is the more wondrous if you reflect,

2. *On the difficulties it had surmounted.* The difficulties of inherent depravity in the human heart. The difficulties of old and sacred systems. Of worldly prejudices and interests. Of rulers and pagan authorities. Yet everywhere the word of the Lord grew, and his subjects were multiplied. We may well be led to enquire,

3. *As to the principle of its success.* It was the divine purity and inherent power of truth. The work of the spirit of the Lord. "Gospel was the power of God." "Weapons were mighty through God." It was the light of heaven chasing away hellish gloom. The energy of *truth* overthrowing the delusion of error. The power of *love* annihilating the elements of wrath and evil. The Omnipotence of *holiness* overthrowing the principles of moral evil. Consider it,

III. IN ITS FINAL GLORIOUS MAGNITUDE. "When it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs," &c.

1. *It shall gain the ascendancy over all other systems of religion.* Judaism. Every form of idolatry. Mahomedanism. The papacy. They must all decline and pass away. All be destroyed by the brightness and glory of Christ's kingdom.

2. *It shall evangelize all the nations of the earth.* It is adapted to man in his general character. It will meet the moral state and spiritual wants and desires of all countries. It shall take root in every soil, and grow and thrive in every clime. It is to be carried into all the world, and preached to every creature. Hence its trophies shall be gathered out of all nations, and people, and colours, and tongues, Rev. vii. 9, &c.

3. *It shall bless all men, and make all men blessed.* See the resplendent visions of the inspired psalmist: Psa. lxxii. 16, 17. Also Isaiah lx. 21, &c. When God's kingdom is set up and consummated, then his will shall be done on the earth even as it is done in heaven. The fact, and not however the glorious results of the triumphs of christianity are presented to us in this parable.

APPLICATION.

1. *The subject is fraught with hope to the friends of Christ.* "He must increase." Of his reign and dominion

there shall be no end. All opposing elements shall be overthrown. The mountain shall be levelled, the valley exalted, &c.

2. *The subject is matter of gratulation to all benevolent minds.* His kingdom is one of righteousness, and peace, and joy. "Blessings abound where'er he reigns," &c.

3. *It may properly lead to personal enquiry.* Are we with and for Christ? His subjects. His friends. "The soldiers of the sacred Host of God's elect." Are we labouring to diffuse the knowledge of his character, and offices, and work? Does his cause absorb our warmest affections—our most intense and ardent zeal?

4. *The obdurate enemies of the cross must perish.* "His enemies he will clothe with shame," &c.

NO. VI.

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN.

"Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."—*Matt.* xiii. 33.

THIS parable in its scope and design seems closely to resemble that of the grain of mustard seed. But while the grain of mustard seed indicates the small commencement and rapid progress of the gospel in the world, is not the parable of the leaven designed to illustrate more directly the workings of grace in the soul? The one may fitly show the progress of the Saviour's kingdom in the world, and the other the establishment of his kingdom in the soul. Let us then consider the parable of the leaven in its personal and spiritual application to religion in the heart. Observe,

I. THAT THE LEAVEN INTRODUCED INTO THE MEAL WAS A FOREIGN ELEMENT. Something materially differen

to the meal itself. Something placed in it by a living, active, agency. So also of the grace of God. It is not natural to man. It does not belong to his nature. It is very different to it. And before man can possess it, it must be imparted by the living Holy Spirit of God. The new nature is spiritual and from above. It is of divine operation. Light, and love, and mercy from heaven.

II. LEAVEN IS OF A MOVING EXCITING NATURE. No sooner is it introduced into the meal, than a moving process commences. It is not needful to dwell on the nature of this chemical action. Now so is it with the grace of God in the soul. The soul is stirred up—quickened. The powers of the mind and the passions of the soul are excited.

- (1.) Darkness gives place to light.
- (2.) Chaos and confusion to order.
- (3.) Insensibility to feeling.
- (4.) Listlessness to anxiety.
- (5.) Apathy to earnest desire.

The reign of sinful death and gravelike silence is superseded by intense spiritual life and activity.

III. LEAVEN IS OF AN ASSIMILATING NATURE. It communicates its own nature to the meal with which it comes in contact. It does not destroy its identity, but alters its qualities. Just so the grace of God in the soul. It does not annihilate any of the faculties or powers of the soul, nor add any new attributes to the mind. But it gives forth its own characteristics to the soul and makes it gracious. Now this process of assimilation is,

1. *Holy.* Grace of God is the principle of holiness, and makes the soul holy. It renovates the heart. It extinguishes the love of sin. Destroys the power of sin. Purifies from its defilement.

(1.) It sanctifies the understanding and fills it with divine knowledge.

(2.) It controls the judgment and brings it under the power of the truth.

(3.) It sanctifies the affections and makes them spiritual and heavenly.

(4.) It purifies the conscience and fills it with divine peace.

(5.) It supplies the memory with stores for meditation.

(6.) It subjugates the will to the authority of the Saviour. And through the mind, it influences the body, so that the members are yielded to works of righteousness. This process of assimilation,

2. *Is silent.* It creates no noise or confusion. So the grace of God in the soul operates secretly and silently. It cometh not with observation. It is the still and silent operation of spirit upon spirit. The effects, may be heard in groans, in sighs, in supplications, and also in loud prayers and exulting thanksgiving, but the operation itself is necessarily silent. In this respect it resembles the silent falling of the *dew*,—or the silent diffusion of the *morning light*,—or the silent influence of the *atmosphere* of life. This assimilation,

3. *Is gradual.* First one part is leavened, and then another. The whole is silently progressive. So is it with divine grace in the soul. Sin is forgiven at once. Justification and conversion must be instantaneous. But sanctifying grace is necessarily gradual. All the similies of scripture confirm this view. First there is the babe,—then the youth,—then the young man, &c. First there is the dawn—then the morning light,—afterwards meridian noon. Hence it is likened to the springing forth of the corn. The growing of the plant. The rising of the building. “All we with open face beholding as in a glass,” &c., 2 Cor. iii. 19. So also the numerous directions to “grow in grace,” &c. To “press towards the mark,” &c. The leaven operates until the assimilation,

4. *Is complete.* “Till the whole was leavened.” This is the tendency and design of the grace of God in the soul.

It contemplates the perfection of the Christian character. It designs our "meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light." It sanctifies body, soul, and spirit. It seeks as much the bringing on of the top stone as laying the foundation. Such are the beautiful and important instructions this parable conveys to us.

Learn,

1. *The seat of true religion is the heart.* The leaven was hidden in the meal. And God's grace must be in the heart. Correct views of it may be in the head, and appropriate observations in the mouth; but the soul is the seat of saving religion.

2. *The essential character of religion is holiness.* "The grace of God that bringeth salvation," &c. "But thanks be to God that *though* ye were the servants of sin," &c. "If we say we abide in Him, we should also walk as He walked."

3. *True religion is the religion of progress.* How true it is that we cannot be stationary. Either advancing or declining. Think of the commands in reference to spiritual progress. Think of the provisions made for it. Think of the great concerns essentially devolving on it.

4. *True religion develops to its subjects a state of future perfection.* "Beloved, now are we the sons of God," &c. "Now we see through a glass darkly," &c. Let each one adopt the language of the apostle Paul, and also resolve with him to "press toward the mark," &c. Philip. iii. 8—15.

No. VII.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”—*Matt.* xiii. 44.

THE kingdom of heaven, or the gospel dispensation, is here likened to a treasure hidden in a field. Probably referring to such cases where people under fear of invasion were in the habit of taking their riches and concealing them in the ground, or else the Saviour may refer to fields containing mines of precious ore, but either sense will accord with the general scope of the parable. Let us consider then the gospel as a treasure. As a hidden treasure. As found by the penitent believer. As purchased by the sacrifice of all. And as producing unspeakable joy. Consider,

I. THE GOSPEL AS A TREASURE. It is often so described. “This treasure we have in earthen vessels,” &c. *2 Cor.* iv. 7. The gospel is,

1. *A treasure of knowledge and truth.* Celestial wisdom is more precious than gold. More to be desired than rubies, &c. God’s saving truth is beyond all description invaluable. Hence we are exhorted to “buy it, and to sell it not.” “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss,” &c. *Philip.* iii. 8. The gospel is a treasure,

2. *Of precious promises.* “Exceeding great and precious promises,” *2 Pet.* i. 4. Promises of pardon. Acceptance. Adoption. Sanctification. All sufficient Grace. A triumphant death, and eternal glory. The gospel is a treasure

3. *Of distinguished blessings.* The divine favour. Un-

speaking peace. Ecstatic joy. It makes its recipients "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ," Rom. viii. 17. It is a treasure,

4. *Of endless life.* "Gift of God is eternal life." "This is the record that God hath given to us—eternal life." This includes the "crown of life." A "throne." A "kingdom." An "inheritance,—incorruptible," &c. Observe,

II. THIS TREASURE IS HIDDEN. It may be considered to have been hidden,

1. *In the ancient types and sacrifices.* These all contained the germs or seeds of gospel truth. They all referred to the Messiah, and the salvation we should obtain. They pointed to the Lamb of God, &c. Hidden,

2. *In old testament predictions and promises.* These all testified of Christ, and referred to his advent, work, offices, sufferings, and glory. They were radiant with hope and joy to a guilty world. Yet in their metaphorical costume and figurative style, the gospel was rather hidden than fully revealed. It is hidden even under the Christian dispensation,

3. *To the prejudiced, the worldly, and careless.*—Hence when Christ revealed to the Jews the character of his kingdom and the blessings he came to bestow, they were so prejudiced that they could not discern in him their long expected Messiah, and they despised his person and rejected his offered grace. "He came to his own," &c. So the worldly and the careless, perceive nothing precious or worthy of their attention in the announcements of the gospel. Worldly riches, honours, or pleasure, conceal the glory and preciousness of the gospel from the minds of men. "If our gospel be hid," &c. In the parable we are directed to consider the gospel treasure,

III. AS FOUND BY THE PENITENT BELIEVER. Christ revealed himself to the lowly and the penitent. The pharisees found not the treasure, but the humble self-convicted

penitent publican did. (1.) Observe the gospel is calculated to produce this state of mind. To level the towering self-righteous thoughts of the mind. To abase and prostrate the sinner in the dust.

(2.) To such only is the gospel treasure promised. "Come unto me all ye that labour," &c. Matt. xi. 28. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," &c., ver. 29. "A broken and a contrite heart," &c.

(3.) Such only find the treasure. "The full soul loatheth the honeycomb," &c. "Others say they are rich and increased in goods," &c. Others imagine they are whole, and need not a physician, &c. Hearing, understanding, believing, is the order appointed for enriching the souls of men with the treasure of the gospel. But observe,

IV. THIS TREASURE IS PURCHASED BY THE SACRIFICE OF ALL. It is obvious that this does not imply any *meritorious* acts on the part of the sinner. The gospel is a system of grace, excluding all worthiness on the part of the sinner. But in securing the treasure of the gospel, it not only cannot be on the ground of the sinner's merit, but he must,

1. *Be willing to part with all his imaginary excellencies to obtain it.* He must feel and confess that he has nothing to pay with, before he can be forgiven.

"I nothing am, and nothing have,
My glory's swallowed up in shame."

2. *He must renounce all self-devised schemes of divine acceptance.* Not only merit, but all other methods of reconciliation to God, except by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

3. *He must abandon all his sins.* "Let the wicked forsake his way," &c. "When the wicked turneth away from his wickedness," &c. See Isaiah i. 16, &c.

4. *He must believingly yield himself up to the Lord.* "I beseech you brethren, by the mercies of God," &c. Rom. xii. i. God demands the confidential surrender of the heart; the whole soul, cheerfully, and believingly, and in the spirit of self-denial. "They first gave themselves to the Lord," &c. The cross must be taken up, and all forsaken, incompatible with the glory of the Saviour. Notice the finding of this treasure,

V. PRODUCES UNSPEAKABLE JOY. The gospel is glad tidings of great joy, &c. Hence the poet exclaims,

"Hark! the glad sound, the Saviour comes,
The Saviour promised long.
Let every heart exult with joy,
And every voice be song."

This joy is real—spiritual—increasing. And tendeth to the celestial joys and rapturous delights of eternal glory.

APPLICATION.

1. How thankful we should be for the gospel.
2. How solicitous to possess its invaluable treasures.
3. How readily part with all for its blessings.
4. And while rejoicing in its possession, how we should recommend it to all impoverished sinners around us.

"To tell to sinners all around,
What a dear Saviour we have found."

5. Let us take care and hide this treasure in our hearts. Hold it fast. Sell it not, &c.

No. VIII.

SPIRITUAL VEGETATION.

“And he said, so is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground: And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how,” &c. —*Mark* iv. 26—29.

THIS beautiful parable may be interpreted and applied either to the origin and progress of christianity in the world, or to the establishment, growth, and perfection of the grace of God in the soul. Both views contain much that is instructive to the mind, and in both are opened to us the mysteries of the divine kingdom. We purpose, however, to consider it in its application to personal religion. Observe,

I. THAT THE PRINCIPLE OF RELIGION IN THE HEART IS DIVINE. It is as “seed cast into the ground.” Not something natural to the heart, or inherent, but something imparted to it. This seed is divine truth. The gospel of the grace of God, heavenly doctrine. Glad tidings of joy from the Lord. (1.) Notice the seed is spiritual. Not of man, or from men.

(2.) It is pure. The holy word of God.

(3.) It is vital and imperishable. Liveth and abideth for ever.

This seed is the germ of true and saving religion. The regenerated soul is born again of it.

II. THAT THE INSTRUMENTALITY EMPLOYED IN CARRYING ON RELIGION IS HUMAN. “As if a man should cast seed,” &c. The apostles and disciples were entrusted with the seed of the kingdom, and they were commissioned to

bear it to the wide world. God still employs his own servants to do this.

(1.) Generally the ministers of the gospel. It is their special work to preach the word,—to sow this seed.

(2.) Oftentimes Christian parents and friends. Who diligently teach their children, and train them up in the knowledge of God's blessed word. "From a child thou hast known the scriptures," &c.

(3.) *Frequently Sabbath School teachers and tract distributors.* These go forth bearing the truths of the gospel, and from Sabbath to Sabbath casting this precious seed into the ground. All Christians should labour to do this. What useful examples the word of God furnishes. Those who were scattered in the early persecution, "went everywhere preaching the word." Acts viii. 4. So also the woman of Samaria, &c.

III. THE OPERATIONS OF DIVINE GRACE ARE INVISIBLE AND MYSTERIOUS. "And the seed should spring up, he knoweth not how," Mark iv. 27. Some of the laws of vegetation are known; for instance, it is understood that the seed must be decomposed, or die, and that from it, germinateth the new life and fruit. But how and in what exact manner no man knoweth. The process too is invisible. It is hidden in the deep earth from the eye of the observer. So the process of grace in the soul, is in like manner both mysterious and invisible to the eye of man. See John iii. 8. God alone knoweth the process of its operations, and seeth its influence on the heart and mind of its recipient. The minister soweth the seed, but for some time knows not its action on the mind. The friend, or relative, even in the midst of daily intercourse, may not for a time discern it. Who can tell the emotions of the heart, and the anxieties and desires of the soul, but God alone?

IV. THE PROCESS OF GRACE IN THE SOUL IS GRADUAL AND PROGRESSIVE. "First the blade, then the ear,

after that the full corn in the ear." Thus divine truth first enlightens the mind; then convicts the conscience; then produces anxiety, remorse, compunction; then desire. There will be contrition, true penitential sorrow, forsaking of sin, and faith in the Lord Jesus as the only refuge and hope. With this will be produced,

1. *The new nature.* Heavenly. Tender. Infantile. Or in the similitude of the text, "the blade." From this will be exhibited,

2. *The evidences of the spiritual life.* Then "the ear," or as it means the stalk as well as the ear. Then will follow,

3. *The fruits of the Christian character.* "The full corn in the ear." The exhibition of the graces and virtues of spiritual religion. The fruits of righteousness to the glory of divine grace. Hence the admonitory counsel of the apostle, "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue," &c. 2 Peter i. 5—8.

V. THE DIVINE TENDENCY OF GRACE IN THE HEART IS TO PERFECT MATURITY. "But when the fruit is brought forth," that is, when it is manifestly full and ripe. Now the great end of the owner of the soil was the bringing forth of this fruit. So also this was the divine purpose in preparing the seed to be sown. This was also the object of the sower. To this, tended the sunshine, the rains, and the dews. God graciously designs the perfection of the work he begins. "He who hath begun the good work," &c. Maturity of Christian character involves, (1.) The perfected graces of the Holy Spirit.

(2.) Deadness to the world.

(3.) Spirituality and heavenly-mindedness of soul.

(4.) Entire conformity and resignation to the divine will.

(5.) "Looking and waiting for that blessed hope," &c.

Titus ii. 13.

VI. GOD TAKES THE MATURE CHRISTIAN TO THE EN-

JOYMENT OF HIMSELF IN GLORY. "But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come," ver. 29. When the Christian is meet for heavenly inheritance. When he has borne the fruit of Christian usefulness. Done his generation's work. Answered all the designs of his heavenly Father,—He then gives the commission to the angelic convoy, as in the case of Lazarus, to bear him to his celestial home and reward. He falls asleep on earth,—he awakes in glory. He dies to all below, and lives in the regions of immortality for evermore. He is not found here, for he has been gathered to the assembly of the first born; he is now enrolled with the spirits of just men made perfect.

We ask in conclusion,

1. Has this work been begun in your souls? Have you received the grace of God in truth?
2. Are you advancing in Christian holiness, and going onwards towards perfection?
3. Let the heavenly rewards be often contemplated to quicken your souls, and to elevate your desires.

No. IX.

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS.

"But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons: and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went," &c.—*Matt.* xxi. 28—31.

MANY of the scribes and pharisees exhibited the most deep-rooted and inveterate prejudice against the Saviour's teaching and mission. Often they endeavoured to catch him in his sayings, that they might have some charge against him.

Jesus often therefore self-convicted them, and out of their own mouths overwhelmed them with confusion. We have a striking instance of this in the passage connected with this subject. To show their perverseness, the Saviour addressed to them this parable, and by their own confessions, he involved them in self-condemnation, ver. 31, 32. Observe,

I. THE REASONABLE COMMANDS OF THE FATHER. "A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard," ver. 28. Observe,

1. *The nature of the command.* "To work in the vineyard." Man was intended for labour. He was made for it. Even in paradise, our first parents were called to it. Indolence is pernicious to body, soul, spirit, and reputation. It is a withering blight. Labour is dignified, and productive both of health and enjoyment. Hence the command itself was reasonable and proper. God calls men to the great work of personal religion. To work out their own salvation, &c. To give diligence to make their calling and election sure. To work while it is called day. Soul work, is all-important, the chief end of life. Observe,

2. *The sphere of labour appointed.* The father's vineyard. A place in which the sons were personally interested. Now God's vineyard is his church. Into this we are to enter by personal piety, and here we are to grow in meetness for heaven. Here we are to improve our graces, employ our talents, do good to men, and glorify God. Has not God a right to specify both the sphere of duty and the labour he demands? Notice,

3. *The manner in which the command was delivered.* And said, "Son, go work to day," &c. Here was nothing harsh or tyrannical. He speaks with authority, but it is the authority of a parent. He addresses him as his son, and thus conveys the idea of the relationship subsisting between them. As son, he owed his father reverence and cheerful obedience. God is our heavenly Father. We are therefore

all his offspring. He is not only the Author of our Being, but the source of all our mercies. What reverence, obedience, and grateful love we owe to him. We are not our own but his, for he hath not only created and preserved, but redeemed us. Observe,

4. *The period of labour required.* "Go work to day." Daytime is working time. There is light for working, and opportunity also. The period allotted for labour. God worked during the six days of the creation of our world. Life is the day for religious working. "Life is the time to serve the Lord." Jesus said, "I must work while it is called day," &c. What a transient period is the day of life. How soon it passes away. How often interrupted and frequently curtailed by sudden and early death. Such were the reasonable requirements of the father, and the claims of God on his creatures. Notice,

II. THE STRANGE AND DIVERSIFIED ANSWERS OF THE SONS. (1.) The first said, "I will not." What disobedience, insolence, and rebellion. A direct and impertinent refusal. What baseness, and fool hardihood, and filial ingratitude it involved. Surely of this abandoned son there could be no hope.

(2.) The second said, "I go, sir." Here was respect, submission, and promised obedience. How forcibly and beautifully it contrasts with the rebellious rudeness of the other. God demands the reverence and fear of his creatures. Divine things and claims must be treated with seriousness and respect. But observe,

III. THE CONDUCT OF THE SONS WHICH SO STRANGELY CONTRASTED WITH THE ANSWERS GIVEN.

1. *The rebellious son becomes penitent and obedient.*—Such were the publicans and sinners to whom John the Baptist preached. So also the publicans and sinners to whom the Saviour preached. They notoriously despised sacred things. Were abandoned and profligate, yet they repented

and obeyed the Baptist, they repented and received salvation from Christ Jesus. How often it has been so.—Cavilling sceptics—profane scoffers,—The openly profane have heard and believed the gospel, to the salvation of their souls. The chief of sinners have been brought to Christ. Zaccheus, the tax-gatherer. The woman who was a sinner. The dying thief. The Corinthian convert. John Bunyan, the swearing tinker, and myriads of like character and condition.

2. *The courteous son was disobedient and deceiving.* All he did was to be civil and promise fairly. For of him it is said, "He went not." Such were the scribes and pharisees. They made high pretensions; they professed much, talked much. But, alas! this was all; they said, and did not. It was merely Lord, Lord, in the mouth, but they did not the things which were commanded. They repented not of sin. They believed not in Christ. They were not sincere workers of godliness before the Lord. How fearfully this will apply,

(1.) To many children of religious parents. They attend with them on the means of grace. They are moral, respectful in their religious conversation, they promise fair, but "go not."

(2.) To many who regularly frequent the House of God. They attend, and listen, and seem interested; but they move not in the way of repentance and holiness.

(3.) It is a faithful picture of many professors. All their religion is in name, in show,—in outside appearance. They walk not in Christ's vineyard. They are not spiritual, or useful, trees with leaves without fruit. Cyphers, cumberers of the ground. How fearful this state! How awful their doom!

Learn,

1. The efficacy of the grace of God to save the vilest of sinners.

2. The importance of experimental and practical religion.

No. X.

THE PARABLE OF THE DEBTORS.

“Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, who would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, who owed him ten thousand talents,” &c.—*Matt.* xviii. 23, 25.

THE religion of the New Testament is evidently one of goodness and mercy. Its very essence is love,—love to God and love to man. How this was exhibited in the life and doctrines of the Lord Jesus Christ! He was embodied goodness,—incarnate mercy. He came to establish an empire of clemency and kindness in our world. He insisted on his disciples cultivating a merciful and forgiving spirit. Out of a conversation with Peter on this subject, the parable before us originated. See ver. 21, 22.—The kingdom of heaven, or the great principles of the gospel, are beautifully set forth in the figurative sketch before us. Observe,

I. THE KING AND THE CONDUCT HE ADOPTED. This monarch is represented as one of great dignity and wealth. It is also to be remarked, that he took exact observation of the state of his affairs, and the accounts of his servants. He was not indolent or neglectful of the concerns of his kingdom. God is doubtless prefigured in the king before us. He is of boundless authority, riches, and glory. All creatures are under his control, and subject to his dominion. He has always an exact knowledge of the state and concerns of all his creatures. His rule is one of exactness, order, and wisdom. Observe,

II. THE INDEBTED SERVANT. “One was brought unto

him who owed him ten thousand talents." This person represented as a servant, doubtless signifies more properly a petty prince, or one employed to collect the revenue in some district of the kingdom. His arrears were fearful, "ten thousand talents." If even of silver, a sum upwards of three millions pounds sterling. It is not said how he came to be so deeply involved in debt. Whether by misfortune, imprudence, or lavish extravagance. He was also entirely insolvent. "He had not to pay his lord." No reference is made even to compounding with him. How exactly does this pourtray the true state of the sinner. A debtor to God. The debt immense, incalculable. A debt that has been accumulating from the moment of his birth. A debt of which he cannot pay the smallest dividend, utterly insolvent. "Poor and wretched, and blind, and naked." Without God and without hope in the world. Observe,

III. THE COURSE THE KING ADOPTED.

1. *He reasonably demanded payment.* This was his equitable claim. God requires the yielding of loyal obedience to him. The perfect love of the heart, and the willing service of the life.

2. *He justly insisted on his punishment.* "Commaned him to be sold," &c. This was the regal right, the understood terms—the covenant between them. God has a just right to punish. He may justly inflict his displeasure. But,

3. *Moved by compassion he freely forgave him.* "The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him," &c. ver. 26. The debt was not denied, but acknowledged. His claims were not disputed. But his patience and clemency were supplicated; and moved by noble generosity he freely and entirely forgave the debt. What an extraordinary instance of goodness and compassion. How beautifully does it set forth the clemency of God to penitent believing sinners. When brought to feel their utter insolvency. When they cast

themselves on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. When they earnestly plead for pardon. Then God, moved by the graciousness of his nature, freely forgives their sins, blotting them out as a cloud, &c. "There is forgiveness with thee," &c. "He who confesseth and forsaketh shall obtain mercy." And no matter how great the debt, he says, "Come now and let us reason together, &c." Notice,

IV. THE UNMERCIFUL SPIRIT THE FORGIVEN DEBTOR DISPLAYED. "But the same servant went out and found one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a hundred pence, and he laid hands on him," &c. (1.) Observe, the debt owed by the fellow-servant was small, "a hundred pence," about three pounds four shillings and seven pence.

(2.) He, too, had nothing to pay with. Lacked the ability to meet the demand.

(3.) He was willing, if time were given, to meet the claim.

(4.) He humbly and earnestly entreated his compassion.

(5.) But the pardoned debtor was inexorable. He acted violently, "seized him by the throat," &c.

(6.) He exercised no forbearance, but at once thrust him into prison, ver. 30. What vile forgetfulness of the clemency which had been shewn to him! What want of feeling and sympathy for an unfortunate fellow-creature! Observe, what a picture of man's unmercifulness to man.

V. THE COURSE WHICH THE KING THEN ADOPTED. "So when his fellow-servants saw what was done they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord after that he had called him, said unto him, "O thou wicked servant," &c., ver. 31, 32. Here his hard-heartedness was laid before him. His wickedness asserted, and the course of conduct he ought to have pursued, pointed out, ver. 33. The anger of the king was excited, and in his displeasure he reversed his own merciful decision, and consigned him to the tormentors, ver. 34. The conduct

of the king as described by Jesus, is the precise mode God will deal with the inclement and unmerciful. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every his brother their trespasses," v. 35.

Observe, God requires that we should be merciful, even as he is merciful. That our mercy must extend to all our enemies, and that it must be hearty and sincere. He requires this not as the meritorious ground of our acceptance, but as the evidence of our love to Him, and as the fruit of his grace within us. That when this is not evinced, he will not accept or save. That an unforgiving spirit alike disqualifies for his kingdom on earth, and his glory in heaven.

No. XI.

THE PARABLE OF THE NET.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind : Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away, &c."—*Matt. xiii. 47, 50.*

THE Redeemer's parables were calculated to interest all classes of persons. The labourer, the sower, the shepherd, and the fisherman, all had divine truth brought down to their capacity, and illustrated by the peculiarities of their several employments. In this parable the Saviour represents the kingdom of heaven as like unto the net which being cast into the sea, encloses within it all kinds of fish, and which when full and brought to shore, the good are separated from the bad. So says the Great Teacher shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, &c., ver. 49, 50. Observe,

I. THE STATE IN WHICH MEN ARE BY NATURE. In the world, represented in the parable by the sea. The world as distinguished from the church, like the sea is an element of restlessness and peril. A state of imminent danger to the best interests of the soul. In this state all unconverted men are found. Hence as the sea abounds with fishes of every kind, so the world with sinners of all descriptions. Here are all the various grades of moral evil,—from the self-righteous moralist to the vilest profligate, or daring blasphemer.

II. OBSERVE THE ONLY MEANS OF EXTRICATING MEN IS BY THE GOSPEL. This is the net of the parable. Just as the net is adapted to enclose the fish in the sea, so is the gospel to save sinners.

1. *It comes down to their circumstances of moral wretchedness.* It recognizes them as fallen and perishing, and it contemplates their deliverance. It announces their ruin, and proclaims their help. It asserts their disease, and offers the healing balm.

2. *It is adapted to the circumstances of all sinners.* Like a large drag net, it comprehends in its designs the rescue of all men. It embraces the wide world. It is addressed to every creature. It speaks to man as man, and reveals a Saviour to every perishing sinner. Hence the commission given by Christ to the disciples. Mark xvi. 15.

3. *The gospel exclusively is adapted to save sinners.* It is God's expedient, and replete with his unerring wisdom. It is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth. Faith cometh by hearing it, and salvation through faith. We know of no other means of men obtaining justification, holiness, and eternal life.

III. THE GOSPEL MUST BE CONNECTED WITH ACTIVE INSTRUMENTALITY. Thus the net must be employed. It must be cast into the sea. So the gospel must be preached. How can men hear without a preacher? Observe,

1. *God has appointed the Christian ministry for this end.* He called, qualified, and sent forth the apostles and evangelists to cast this net into the sea. To preach the gospel. He does so still. He raises up holy, benevolent, and zealous ministers to give themselves earnestly and devotedly to fishing for souls. Jesus says now, as in the days of his flesh, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Observe,

2. *That preaching the gospel is an arduous, laborious work.* Few occupations involve more toil and fatigue, and self-denial, than that of the fisherman. Such also is the laborious calling of the Christian minister. He must be wholly given to it in heart and holy desire for the good of souls. Instant in season and out of season. He must sacrifice the love of ease, and the honours, and rewards of the world, and bear the cross of his Divine Master. He must tread in the self-denying steps of his blessed Lord. He must not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. He must bear the truth to men under all circumstances and at all hazards. The early preachers of the cross, as well as modern missionaries, hazarded their lives for Christ and his cause. Observe,

IV. THAT THE GOSPEL CANNOT POSSIBLY BE PREACHED IN VAIN. "The net cast into the sea gathered of every kind," v. 47. Hence the intentions of the fisherman were answered. He did not employ his net in vain. So God has engaged that his word shall not return unto Him void. Isaiah lv. 10, 11. The success of the gospel has been varied. Sometimes multitudes of men have been converted, as on the day of Pentecost. During the ministry of Wesley and Whitfield, and others. But in all ages and countries, where the cross has been lifted up, sinners have been drawn out of the world to Christ. It is so now, both in our own and in heathen lands. It shall be very successfully so, introductory to the millennial reign of the Saviour. See Isaiah lx. 7, 8, &c. Notice,

V. THAT ALL BROUGHT INTO CHRIST'S VISIBLE CHURCH ARE NOT CONVERTED PERSONS. The net enclosed "of every kind." Not only will the gospel save men of all ranks and ages, and conditions, but it will bring many into the outward kingdom of Christ, who are not regenerated, spiritual persons. Good and bad.

(1.) Many hypocrites as Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, &c.

(2.) Many formalists, having only a name to live, &c.

(3.) Many inconsistent. Who run well for a season, but who are hindered, &c. Who make shipwreck, &c.

VI. THAT IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT THERE WILL BE A COMPLETE SEPARATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED. See ver. 48, 49.

(1.) The period certified is when the net is full and brought to shore. When the gospel dispensation is consummated. The end of the world.

(2.) The agency is that of angels, the ministers of the divine judgments. See parable of the wheat and tares, v. 39.

(3.) The scrutiny will be exact. All the good will be gathered out. Every sincere believer will be recognized and exalted. Every hypocrite and unconverted person will be detected. Escape will be impossible.

(4.) The decision to the ungodly will be awful and final. "Cast away." "Cast into the furnace of fire," &c., v. 30. Without hope,—the subjects of weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

(5.) The salvation of the righteous will be certain. "Happy the people in such a case," &c.

No. XII.

THE PARABLE OF THE DAY LABOURERS.

“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that was a householder, who went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard,” &c.—*Matt. xx. 1, 15.*

By some this parable has been supposed to refer to the various periods of life, when persons are converted and enter into the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. And hence those engaged at the eleventh hour are supposed to refer to persons becoming religious in old age, or to a death-bed repentance. It is very obvious that nothing of this kind was intended to be conveyed to us by the Great Teacher. The whole scope of the parable is to shew that God in the exercise of a gracious sovereignty, may dispose of his rewards to those who are late introduced into his vineyard, and whose period of labour is therefore of very short duration. Hence God may give the same spiritual or eternal blessings to the Gentiles last called, as he did to the Jews; or to the nations who shall be last converted to the faith, as he did to those converted by the apostles and earliest preachers of the gospel. To all he will be faithful in giving the promised rewards, and to some he may justly do this who have laboured but one hour in his service. Observe, however, several very important principles which the parable contains.

I. THE CONDITION, SPIRITUALLY, IN WHICH SINNERS LIVE. “Idle,” during the day of life. “Idle,” with the powers and facilities of labour. “Idle,” though accountable to God, and notwithstanding his high claims upon their

service. With death, and judgment, and eternity before them, still idle as to the great work of godliness.

II. THE GREAT DESIGN OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IS TO URGE MEN TO A REGARD TO THE DUTIES OF RELIGION. Hence they must shew men the folly and wickedness of neglecting their souls. That the toils of sin are infinitely more severe and degrading than the service of the Saviour. That Christ's labour is sweet and refreshing, and in bearing his yoke, men find rest to their souls. Men must be urged to the work,

1. *Of solemn consideration.* A review of their past lives, &c. Their present condition. One great reason of men's unconcern about their soul is, they do not consider. Hence the requirement of heaven is, "that they consider their ways." Hence the expostulation. Isaiah i. 2, 3. Then there is the work,

2. *Of sincere repentance.* "Repentance towards God." A repentance involving in it conviction of sin—contrition and sorrow for sin—breaking off from sin, and turning to the Lord with full purpose of heart. An entire change of heart and life in respect of sin. See Isaiah i. 16, &c. Where fruits meet for repentance are brought forth.

3. *Of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.* Jesus answered and said unto them, "This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom He hath sent," John vi. 29. Hence the disciples went forth, and preached that men should repent and believe the gospel.

III. THAT THE CHURCH OF GOD IS A SPHERE OF LABOUR AND ACTIVITY. Hence Christ's disciples are to be working disciples. Men are introduced into the gospel, not only to enjoy its fruits, but to work therein. True religion is eminently practical. It is the devotion of the heart and life to God. It is walking in the way of his commandments. It is doing the will of our Father in heaven. There are works of devotion—works of self-denial—works of bene-

volence and mercy. These works are fully specified in the word of God. And for the discharge of them, sufficient grace is provided.

IV. THAT GOD WILL RECKON WITH HIS SERVANTS, AND REWARD THEM WHEN THE DAY OF LABOUR IS PAST. Let it not be forgotten that God has a right to all we are, and to all we can do. We never can place the Lord under any obligations by anything we do for Him. But in mercy and goodness to us, he hath promised great and munificent rewards to all his faithful servants. There are rewards in God's service. For in keeping his commands, there is great reward. But the chief rewards of godliness,

1. *Are reserved until after death.* "Be thou faithful unto death," &c. "He that endureth to the end," &c. So in the parable, "when the even was come," ver. 8. The day of life past.

2. *These rewards will be great.* Not merely equitable remuneration. For, alas! what would that be to unprofitable servants. But according to his rich and overflowing mercy, the infinite bountifulness of his nature, through the immeasurable merits of the Mediator, will he abundantly bless us. These rewards according to human calculation,

3. *Will not be always proportionate.* Those hired at the eleventh hour will receive the penny. The last converts, as well as the early ones, will be crowned with glory, immortality, and eternal life. None will receive less than they expected, but many infinitely more. The rewards,

3. *Will be eternal.* An eternity of rest after toil. An eternity of peace after the troubles of life. An eternity of joy after grief, and at God's right hand, pleasures for evermore. A crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Learn,

1. *That the sovereignty of God exhibited in this parable, is a sovereignty that inflicts no wrong on any of his creatures.* It is merciful to all, though especially merciful to some.

2. *How necessary to cherish a candid and generous spirit towards others.* We should rejoice in the abundant blessings and privileges which some enjoy. Our eye ought not to be evil, because God is good, ver. 15.

3. *Human conclusions will in many cases be reversed in the last day.* "So the last shall be first, and the first last," &c., ver. 16.

No. XIII.

PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP.

"And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it?" &c.—*Luke xv. 3, 7.*

THE scribes and pharisees were exceedingly indignant with Christ, because he ate and drank with publicans and sinners. As the professed Messiah they expected to have engaged all his attention, and they desired that he would treat the profane and irreligious with the contempt and scorn which they ever displayed towards them. Instead of this Christ mingled among them, addressed them in his gracious discourses, and received with open arms all who came in penitence and faith to Him. To justify this course was the design of the parable which he now delivered to them. Observe, the endangered wanderer—the kindly shepherd—and the joyous exultation. Observe,

I. **THE ENDANGERED WANDERER.** The parable supposes a sheep of the fold to have wandered and been lost, a striking and fit description of man's natural condition. This is most forcibly expressed by the evangelical prophet who says, "all we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned

every one to his own way," Isaiah liii. 6. This is a great doctrinal truth,—the fall of man, and the ruin and depravity of the whole species. Prophets, the Lord Jesus, and apostles all teach and insist on this truth. Man has wandered,

1. *From the authority of God.* Thrown off divine controul—said to the Most High, "Depart from us," &c." He is described as despising and contemning Jehovah. Acting as a traitor and rebel against the sovereign authority of God. He would not have the Lord even in his thoughts. He has wandered,

2. *From the family of God.* He was once in league with holy angels. Most probably they were his companions, we know they were his friends. How holy, and happy, the family of man in innocency. But by apostacy man lost his birthright. Became an outcast, &c. His being driven out of Eden was the visible sign of his having wandered from the family of God. Observe,

3. *He has wandered in the way of peril and death.* The tendency of sin is towards death. It is the way of death. Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. The threatened sentence was, "dying thou shalt die." The wandering sinner is seeking death in the error of his ways. The end of his course is inevitably death. Observe,

4. *The sinner would wander endlessly but for the intervention of divine grace.* This can easily be accounted for, if you remember, there are no desires after God, no holiness in the heart of man by nature. His tendencies are all downward and towards perdition. Satan, who exercises dominion over him, would beguile him, and seduce him away from God and safety. The habit of sinning would greatly increase his love of evil, and his dislike of holy things. Observe then,

II. THE KINDLY SHEPHERD. He pities. He seeks. He restores the wanderer. How applicable this to the Saviour.

1. *He compassionated man in his fallen and ruined con-*

dition. Hence the scheme of redemption is ever attributed to the pure compassion of God.

“He saw us ruined by the fall,
And loved us notwithstanding all.”

“When we were without strength,” &c. See Titus iii. 3, 7. Compassion moved his heart, and induced him to undertake our recovery and salvation.

2. *He actually came to seek the wanderer.* Jesus left heaven, and laid aside his glory, and became a man,—the subject of poverty and reproach, and suffering, that he might find the wanderer. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance,” &c. “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which is lost.” For this he lived, and suffered, and died.

“Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God,
He to rescue me from danger,
Interposed his precious blood.”

3. *He finds and restores the wanderer.* He did so in the days of his flesh. He does so now by the ministry of the gospel. All the saved and happy spirits received into heaven from our world,—were the sought, and found of the Saviour. Are not many of you among the number who can sing, “He restoreth my soul.” We hope most of you have been found by Christ. Among the wanderers found by Christ are sinners of all descriptions, and of all grades of guilt. Some he found in the polluted haunts of profligacy. Others in the mazes of worldliness. Others in the deceitful paths of pleasure. But they were all in the way which leadeth to death. All would have perished had they not been sought out and found by him. Observe,

III. THE JOYOUS RESULTS. “And when he hath found it he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing,” &c.

1. *The shepherd rejoices in the attainment of his gracious purposes.* He highly values the straying sheep. His best feelings are now gratified. Jesus is represented as seeing of the travail of his soul and being satisfied. This was the end of his sorrows and griefs,—the joy set before him. In the rescue and elevation of his fallen creatures, his benevolent spirit overflows with rapturous delight.

2. *Angels also rejoice:* ver. 7. They are deeply interested in the destiny of man. They have often been messengers of mercy to our world. They hailed the advent of the Saviour with great joy. They exult in the sinner's conversion, and they bear the souls of the rescued to the habitations of the blessed. Their love to God, their love of holiness, and their love to man, induce them to rejoice in the sinner's salvation.

3. *The restored wanderer also rejoices.* He sings, "I will praise thee," &c. He invites others to hear what God has done for his soul. He goes on his spiritual way rejoicing. He rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

4. *All spiritual persons acquainted with the sinner's restoration rejoice.* The minister. The parent. The friend. The church. None but the self-righteous and pharisaic, envy and repine. And in proportion to the danger and hopelessness of the sinner's state, is the exultation in his being found by Christ. We ask in conclusion,

1. *Are you still wandering?* If so, oh stop! Reflect, and hear the voice of the seeking Saviour.

2. *Are you found and restored?* Give God the praise, and glorify Him with your bodies and souls, which are His.

No. XIV.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

“And he said, A certain man had two sons : and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living,” &c.—*Luke xv.* 11, 16.

OF all the Saviour’s parables, this is one of the most interesting and affecting. It is impossible to read it without being struck with the felicity of its descriptions, and the tenderness and compassion which it breathes throughout. Surely sin was never painted in more striking colours, or human wretchedness in more piteous strains. And where can we find such an instance of the paternal love and compassion, as is presented to us in the conduct of the father? Let us then examine and dilate on the important particulars it presents to our view. Let us look at the prodigal,

I. IN HIS ORIGINAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF HONOUR AND HAPPINESS. He was in his father’s house a partaker of all its comforts and enjoyments. The object of paternal affection, bearing the honoured name, and moving in the honoured rank of his family. This was man’s original state,—upright, innocent, and happy. God his Father. Eden his home. The earth his domain. Angels his companions. Bliss his portion. All that divine wisdom and love could provide, he possessed. All that he could really enjoy was provided. An ample portion was his inheritance. See him,

II. IN THE ARROGANCE OF HIS PRESUMPTUOUS CLAIM. What did he really want? Where could he be more dignified or happy? But he seeks to have his portion to himself. He desires to do with it as he pleases. He seeks to throw off

parental restraints and controul. He deems himself sufficient for the management of his own concerns. What was the original sin but throwing off God's restraints, though reasonable and kind, and really for man's good? He desired to act as he pleased, and to have his powers and possessions at his own disposal. Alas! this claim was foolish, ungrateful, and as the sequel shews, fatal to his hopes and happiness. Observe him,

III. IN HIS DISSIPATED WANDERINGS. His portion awarded him, he flies the paternal roof, escapes the parental jurisdiction, and goes into a far country. Sin is the soul's moral departure from God. Sinning is wandering from his family, and throwing off his authority. Every step in the course of transgression, is going further and further from the Lord.

(1.) This wandering is very gradual and insidious. The moral aberrations are at first small, and only just perceptible. Our first parents gazed on the forbidden tree. Then admired it. Then desired. Then with the passions on the side of evil, they reasoned and listened to the temptations of the seducer. Then the hand was stretched out. And last of all the fruit was eaten. This generally is the gradual and insidious course of the sinner. The prodigal would retire at first a day's journey from his home.

(2.) This wandering is increasingly rapid. The habit and love of evil formed, the course is downward and rapid. Respectability and decency are discarded. Conscience becomes seared,—self-respect abandoned. The good opinions of others despised. Now enormous sins are easily perpetrated. No fear of God before the eyes. He now runs greedily and hastily to do evil. He can blaspheme,—mock at sin. Sit in the scoffer's chair. Be the hearty associate of the vilest of the vile. He is sold, body, soul, and spirit, to do wickedly.

(3.) This wandering is awfully dangerous. It is the way

of shame, misery, and death. Its paths lead down to an early grave, and to the depths of hell. Observe the prodigal,

IV. IN HIS WRETCHEDNESS AND MISERY: ver. 14. "He had spent all." Sin is fearfully expensive. Let the experience of the drunkard, the gambler, and the pleasure taker, certify to the truth of this. Every vice except that of avarice is so, and that feeds on the very vitals of its victims. Pride,—ambition,—profligacy,—are all ruinous to the means of those who wander in their dissipated paths. "He spent all." A rich portion was gone,—gone rapidly and foolishly. Now comes the moral dearth,—famine. The means are exhausted. He begins now to be "in want." The first transgressors were expelled the garden; they lost every tree, and all the luxuries of Eden, by tasting of the forbidden fruit. Mad experiment! Ruinous meal! Profligacy is followed by want,—extravagance by misery. This is the history of myriads. Behold him,

V. IN HIS UNALLEVIATED DISTRESS. The proud prodigal becomes a swineherd, the most degrading and miserable of all occupations. What filthy employment Satan gives his vassals to do! How iniquity degrades and debases. It is a constantly falling state,—men sink lower and lower until covered with infamy their souls commingle with the vile and the lost in the abyss of woe beneath. Even swine's food is not given him, ver. 16. By husks is meant the fruit of the Carob-tree, which was used in feeding swine, and on which the most poor and wretched were compelled to live. Where are his evil associates? Why not go to the haunts of his former pleasures and rioting? Sin is a cruel, hardening thing. Sinners victimize one another. Rob and destroy each other. "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." There is no aliment of life and comfort in the region of sin. Ah! the contrast between the prodigal's state now and when at home in the midst of plenty and comfort. Look at his wan and pallid countenance. Look at his ragged,

filthy dress. See him at his accursed employment. For cursed said one of the Rabbins, "is he that feedeth swine." See him seeking the meanest fare in vain, and what is the conclusion to which we must come. "The way of transgressors is hard." "It is a hard and bitter thing to sin against the Lord."

No. XV.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

(SKETCH II.)

"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee," &c. —*Luke xv. 17, 20.*

WE have seen in our last discourse the prodigal in his original state of happiness,—in his wanderings,—and in his utter wretchedness. We have now to contemplate him under the favorable circumstances, which took place at the very crisis of his misery and distress. Far from home. In a degraded service. In utter destitution. Without friends, or sympathy in his misfortunes, and exclaiming, "I perish with hunger." But the darkest part of his career is now passed, his misery drives him to reflection,—for observe,

I. REASON RESUMES HER DOMINION. "And when he came to himself." His course had been one of madness—insanity,—delirium. Was it not so to throw off the paternal yoke of wisdom, and love? Was it not so to trust to his

own inexperience? Was it not so to go out into a far and unknown region—without object, or counsellor, or guide? Was it not so to waste a life's substance in a few years? Was it not so to become the companion of harlots and thieves? Was it not so to be indifferent to his affairs, till ruin stared him in the face? Surely all this was evidence of the direst infatuation,—the most obvious madness. All sin is madness, the opposite of sound reason, of true wisdom.

(1.) To reject and despise God.

(2.) To prostitute the powers of the soul to evil.

(3.) To neglect the great end of life.

(4.) To be indifferent to our own welfare.

(5.) To disregard the certain solemnities of death, judgment, and eternity. But the prodigal came to himself.

1.) For, behold, he stops in his career of vice, to consider. He now soliloquises with himself.

(2.) He now thinks of the home he had despised. "How many hired servants," &c.

(3.) He now perceives distinctly, and confesses frankly his own condition. "I perish with hunger." In these we see the first indications of the return of a good understanding, and a sound judgment. Happy sign, when the sinner pauses, and begins to consider. Men perish, because they do not, they will not consider. Consideration is the herald of repentance, and the harbinger of reformation.

Observe,

II. THE RESOLUTION WHICH HE ADOPTS. He determines,

1. *On an immediate return to his forsaken home.* "I will arise," &c. v. 18. It is evident from the very language he employs, that this resolution is the result of deep conviction, and that it is decisive. He goes no longer in the way of sin and death. He has already repented, changed his mind, and changed his position,—his face is now set home-

wards. His eyes are in the right direction,—his mind is made up. He resolves to return, and do so at once. How necessary is such a resolution! For the want of it many have wavered, and halted, until the door of hope has closed. Let such a resolution be formed in connexion with earnest prayer, for the Divine help, in firm confidence that God will give grace for its performance. Avoid self-confidence, let the broken and vain resolutions of untold myriads, warn you not to trust in yourselves.

2. *He resolves freely to confess his sins.* “And will say, Father, I have sinned,” &c., v. 18. His confession is frank and ingenuous. No attempt at palliation. Not one word in self-defence. Not the least attempt to extenuate. “I have sinned.” By my ingratitude of heaven’s disobedience. I have been foolish, base and wicked. My career has been one of madness, and self-degradation, and infamy. I now see it, know it, feel it, deplore it, and confess it. I hate myself for it. I am full of self-loathing, and self-condemnation. “Against heaven”; against its goodness, and righteous claims. “And before thee.” With fool hardihood, and shameless presumption. How striking and full this confession! How the very purpose of it must have relieved his wretched, guilty spirit.

3. *He resolves to be content with any place in his Father’s dwelling.* “And am no more worthy to be called thy son,” &c. v. 19. He had forfeited by his infamy, the family name. He had no claim to be reinstated in his original place, having squandered the portion allotted to him. He is willing to become a servant. Better far to be a servant of his father, than the servile herdsman of swine. He would be satisfied with this,—deemed himself worthy of nothing better. Such are the feelings of the sin convicted soul. The soul is prostrated in the dust. The least of God’s mercies is earnestly desired. Willing to be anything, or to do anything for the Lord.

III. THE COURSE WHICH HE PROMPTLY CARRIES OUT.
 "And he arose," &c. v. 20.

1. *Immediately, without delay.* At once. He did not defer it to another season. His misery—his danger urged him to action. His feelings were intense, so that at once, "He arose," &c. How many have perished for want of immediate action. Their views have been correct,—convictions have been experienced,—resolutions formed; but then, delay has followed, and these delays have been increased, until the harvest has ended, and until the day has expired, until it has been too late. "To day, therefore, if ye will hear his voice," &c. "Behold, now is the accepted time." &c.

2. *He persevered in his homeward course.* He resolutely set out, and retraced his steps. He allowed nothing to divert him from his purpose, and though he had wandered far, he stayed not until he drew near to the land he had forsaken. Hindrances to the repentant sinner will be presented. But the course of penitential return, must be pursued; the language of the soul must be, "Hinder me not." The ears must be closed, as in the case of Bunyan's Pilgrim, and the cry must be, "Eternal life! eternal life!!"

Happy change! He now enters on the region of hope. But another discourse must open to us his paternal reception.

We ask, in conclusion,

(1.) How many present know the prodigal's repentance, in their own experience?

(2.) Who will now consider his ways, and turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart?

(3.) There must be repentance, or inevitable death.

No. XVI.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

(SKETCH III.)

“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him : And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son,” &c.—*Luke xv. 20, 32.*

WE have now to contemplate the most beautiful part of this moral picture. The prodigal is on his way homeward, and we are now to witness the happy results of true repentance, and spiritual reformation of life. He has now arrived in the precincts of the paternal dwelling. His mind full of anxiety—his heart throbbing with the conflicting emotions of shame, penitence, and hope. The Saviour introduces the father to us, as if he had been looking towards the country to which the prodigal had wandered. No doubt his heart had often been moved, and his bowels yearned over his wicked and disobedient child. Observe then, in this part of the parable,

I. THE HAPPY MEETING. In this meeting there is much of minute detail, that must not be overlooked.

1. *The father first saw the prodigal.* He beheld him when yet at a considerable distance. Saw him in his rags and misery ; yet saw him returning,—knew him as his rebellious child, but now with his rebellious heart subdued.

God our gracious Father, sees the first dawn of spiritual light, in the sinner's mind. He observes the emotions of the penitent's heart. He witnesses his feet returning towards the way of obedience, and life.

2. *The father ran to meet the prodigal.* Does not withdraw himself, nor even wait for the penitent obeisance of his child. Full of love, he hastens to meet him, and thus to inspire him with hope and joy. How affectionate and condescending! Yet, just so God seeks the wandering sinner, —beseeches him to come to him, and live. Says, “Come now and let us reason,” &c. Isaiah i. 18, &c.

3. *The father exhibits the reconciled state of his heart towards him.* “And had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck,” &c. The father was first in this reconciliation. His bosom overflowed with tenderest love. He required nothing to produce it. It was his very nature. He delighted to exhibit it. How free—how full—how spontaneously it flowed. He embraces him. He gives him the token of his pardon and favour, for he kisses him. And now, observe,

4. *The prodigal's confession.* His father's mercy and tender preventing love, did not satisfy the prodigal, or render his repentance and confession the less, but rather the more necessary, His shame would be doubled. His remorse vastly deepened. His sorrow the more intense at having offended, despised, and forsaken such a father. So he said, “Father, I have sinned,” &c. The goodness of God generally leadeth to repentance. It is the cross of Christ subdues the heart. The graciousness of the gospel that gives it, its saving power. Observe,

II. THE HEARTY RECEPTION. We have seen him already in the father's arms, and bosom. Observe, now, the train of blessings which he receives.

1. *His rags are exchanged for the family costume.* “The best robe is put upon him.” God has appointed to those that mourn in Zion, “Beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” Isaiah lxi. 3. See Psalm xxx. 11.

2. *The ring of acceptance is placed on his finger.* This is the sign, and token, and pledge of pardon, and reconcilia-

tion. It would remind him both of his wanderings and adoption.

3. *God gives his spirit to testify to the penitent sinner's acceptance.* Shoes are placed on his feet. Servants and slaves generally worked barefoot. This shewed, therefore, that he was received as a son, and not as a hired servant. The children of God wear the shoes of the preparation of the Gospel of peace. The emblem of filial obedience, and love. Notice,

III. THE DISTINGUISHED BANQUET. "And bring hither the fatted calf," &c. v. 23. Here was a festival of joy and gladness. The gospel dispensation is often likened to a feast. It was predicted as such. See Isaiah xxv. 6, 7. The Saviour compared it also to a feast. Matt. xx. 1, 4. Observe,

1. *The provision was abundant.* The richest and best the family could provide.

2. *The guests were numerous.* The tidings of the returned prodigal were soon spread abroad, and neighbours and friends were invited to share in the joy of the occasion.

3. *The rejoicing was great.* A lost son found, a dead son alive! No marvel at the sound of mirth and gladness being heard afar off. If the finding of a lost piece of money, or recovering a wandering sheep should give joy,—how much more the restoration of an immortal mind,—Salvation of a deathless being, the recovery of a prodigal child. What joy should the restoration of a fallen sinner produce on earth, when the very angels of God are enraptured, and exult on the occasion. The parable concludes,

IV. WITH THE COLD HEARTED ENVY OF THE ELDER BROTHER. v. 25, &c. Here doubtless was portrayed the spirit of the Jews in general, in their dislike of the Gentiles, but more especially the envy of the Pharisees, that Christ should receive publicans and sinners. The spirit of the elder brother,

1. *Was base and inhuman.* For the occasion of the joy,

was his brother—his younger brother. He refuses him however, that appellation, and calls him, “Thy son.”

2. *It was self-righteous and odious.* He describes himself as faultless. “Neither transgressed I at any time,” v. 29. Who can truly say that? Let him who is without sin, cast the first stone. He had no consideration for the frailty of man,—no pity for an erring brother. How striking the contrast of the spirit of the father, and of the elder brother! How forcibly, yet sweetly, he replies to his unkind, and envious remarks! How he dwells on the interesting character of the occasion! How he defends the joy and gladness which was exhibited. “It was meet that we should make merry for this thy brother,—not only my son, but thy brother was dead,—so reckoned by us, and is alive again,—lives and breathes in our midst; and was lost, and is found.”

Learn,

1. *How generous and pure is the benevolence of the gospel.* It is of God, and from Him, and resembles his tender and infinite love.

2. *How hateful is an envious self-righteous spirit.* It is the spirit of the evil one, and therefore from beneath.

3. *Happy they who have repented of sin, and who have been received into the Saviour’s family of love.*



No. XVII.

PARABLE OF THE UNPROFITABLE SERVANT.

“But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink,”
 &c.— xvii. 7, 10.

make

How important it is that we should have correct views of the divine claims upon us, and the spirit in which those claims should be met. We can err as to our duty through ignorance, or as to the manner of performing it, through the pride which is within us. It is clear that God does not require meritorious services from us in order to our acceptance with him, yet he does require the obedient homage of all who are accepted of him. The sacrifice of Christ alone is the ground of our acceptance,—the evidence of it, the fruits of practical godliness. The parable illustrates the nature of the service God requires. The support He affords in it. And the divine independency with respect to it. Observe,

I. THE NATURE OF THE SERVICE GOD REQUIRES. It is indicated by the labours of the servants who are described as “ploughing or feeding cattle.” That is, doing his work. Attending to his concerns. Now God just requires that we do his bidding. And this he,

1. *Has revealed in His word.* A knowledge of his statutes will make us acquainted with his will, and our duty. Personal, social, and public duties, are all revealed here. The duties we owe immediately to him, to his people, and to

the world. The whole province of obedience is mapped out in his holy word.

2. *For this He has given us the capacity and powers which are essential.* In his laws he has consulted our abilities and powers. He demands nothing that cannot be fully yielded. He seeks only according to the ability he bestows, and expects a return just in proportion to the talents committed to our trust. The obedience he claims must possess the following characteristics.

(1.) It must be the obedience of love. Not of terror or constraint. Not servile,—but affectionate. “This is the love of God that we keep his commandments,” &c.

(2.) It must be spiritual. There must be the act, and also the spirit in the action performed. No service will please him which is not spiritual.

(3.) It must have respect to all his commandments. It must be entire,—obeying all his will.

(4.) It must be constant. The habit of the life. The daily course. In all things seeking to please him.

(5.) It must be persevering fidelity unto death. Occupying till he shall come. Working to the end of the day of life. Observe,

II. THE SUPPORT HE GIVES IN IT. This is implied in his sitting down to “eat and drink,” ver. 7, 8. Notice,

1. *God gives ability for the service.* The daily strength is imparted by him. All our power and sufficiency is of God. We can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us.

2. *He provides daily food for the soul.* The bread of life, and the waters of salvation. Grace according to the day. Food to eat,—of which the world knows nothing. The rich and sufficient blessings of the gospel.

3. *He gives satisfaction and peace in the service.* They have great peace who keep thy law, &c. The peace of faith-

ful servants flows as a river. A satisfaction and joy, sweet and unspeakable. The devoted servant of the Lord sings,

“I would not change my blest estate,
For all the world calls good and great.”

All proper labour tendeth to profit, but the service of God especially and preeminently. “Godliness is profitable,” &c. But there is also,

4. *The joy arising from the hope of reward.* Unto the servants of the Lord are given exceeding great and precious promises. Promises of future and eternal glory. His faith often anticipates the glory that shall be revealed, and the crown that fadeth not away. “I know whom I have believed,” &c. Notice,

III. THE DIVINE INDEPENDENCY WITH RESPECT TO THIS SERVICE. Doth the master thank “that servant because he did the things that were commanded,” &c ver. 9. Now the force of this will be seen when it is remembered,

1. *That no man can go beyond the divine claims in his obedience.* God claims the entire obedience of body, soul, and spirit. So that works of supererogation are literally impossible.

2. *God’s goodness to man is ever beyond the services he receives from him.* So that man must by necessity ever be a debtor to God.

3. *That man’s best services are, in consequence of his infirmities, frail and imperfect.* So that he must ever be the subject of the divine forbearance and long-suffering. “For he knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust.” It is only through the virtue of the Saviour’s mediation, that either the person or obedience of man can be accepted of the Lord. How fitting then that they should say, “We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do,” ver. 10.

Learn,

1. *How necessary is humility even to the most exalted saints.* Indeed in proportion to the progress of religion in the soul, will true and unfeigned humility be evinced. Let us avoid a self-righteous complacency, or satisfaction with ourselves. In reference to true grace,

“Whoever says he has enough,
Confesses he has none.”

2. *In all our obedience, let us set the glory of God before us.* We must ever aim at this. “Whether we eat or drink,” &c.

3. *Those who refuse to obey the Lord must finally perish.* Disobedience, and the divine wrath, are inseparably allied. The soul that sinneth incorrigibly, must surely die. “Then let the wicked forsake his way,” &c.

No. XVIII.

THE GREAT SUPPER.

“Then said he unto them, **A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servants at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready, &c.**”—*Luke* xiv. 16, 24.

ONE of the most common representations given of the gospel is that of a feast. This we not only meet with in the writings of the Jewish prophets, but in several of the parables of the Saviour. It is clear that the idea is that of the munificent preparation made to supply all the wants of perishing sinners. The supper to which our present subject refers, is described as a great one. Probably on account

of the station and rank of the person who provided it, or on account of the abundance by which it was distinguished, or perhaps especially because of the great number of the guests invited, for he "bade many." In the conduct of those invited, we see exhibited the unbelief of the Jews to whom Christ came, and who first received the invitation of the gospel. But on their unbelief, the offer of salvation was extended to the Gentiles, and all men were bidden to come to the banquet of grace and partake freely. Observe,

I. THE INVITATION FIRST ISSUED. Observe,

1. *The time of the invitation.* "At supper time." The evening of the day. At the introduction of the gospel dispensation by the Lord Jesus Christ,

2. *The nature of the invitation.* "Come." Come to the place of the banquet. Come and unite with the guests expected. Come and partake of the provision prepared. It was free, and generous, and direct.

3. *The persons by whom the invitations were sent.* By "His servants." The Lord Jesus as the servant of the Father, invited men. So also did his apostles and disciples by his express directions. Notice,

II. THE REJECTION OF THE INVITATIONS BY THE INVITED GUESTS. Observe,

1. *The unanimity of their refusals.* "They all with one consent," &c. They seemed to be actuated by the same spirit, and all began to make excuse. How fearfully illustrated in the general rejection of the Saviour by the Jewish nation. "He came unto his own," &c. "Who hath believed our report," &c. Notice,

2. *The various reasons which they assigned,*

(1.) The inspection of new bought property, ver. 18. His heart was so set upon his purchase, that he could not enjoy even a feast till he had seen it. He desired to gaze on the field which he had added to his former possessions. Hence covetousness, or the lust of the eye, was the impediment

to the first. "How hardly shall they who have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven."

(2.) *Engrossing business was the next reason assigned.* "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and must go and prove them." Diligence in the management of worldly affairs, is not only blameless but commendable. The apostolic direction is, "Diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." But here it absorbed the whole man,—engrossed all his care and time. He could not spare a few moments for the supper, for the monopoly which worldly traffic had established in his soul.

(3.) *Domestic duties were assigned by a third.* "I have married a wife, and therefore cannot come." A regard to the claims of social life, is praiseworthy. A man should honour, and love, and care for the things of his wife. How beautiful to see domestic life enlightened and blessed by the cheering rays of enlightened affection and courtesy. But the wife is not to be the idol,—not to have the throne,—not to displace Jehovah. If a man love parents, or wife, or children more than Christ, he is not worthy of Christ. The folly, as well as sinfulness of all these excuses, will be manifest, if you consider, that surely the man who bought the ground, would not do so, without first seeing it, nor purchase the oxen without first proving them. And the man had not pledged himself to his wife never to be absent from her, even to go to a feast. So that the excuses indicated the folly of the individuals, and shewed that they felt no interest in the feast to which they were invited. Notice,

III. THE INVITATIONS WHICH WERE SUBSEQUENTLY ISSUED: ver. 21. "Then the master said, go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city," &c. Observe,

1. *How extended the commission.* "To the streets," &c. No longer to special persons, but to the mass. Just so

when the kingdom of heaven was opened to the perishing Gentiles. To all the world and to every creature.

2. *How benevolent the arrangement.* "Now the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind," are invited. The necessitous and perishing. The wretched and unfortunate.

3. *How urgent the appeal.* These crowded to the supper, but still the provision was so ample, and the banquetting hall so large, that yet there was room. Then the invitations were still further extended,—unto the "highways, hedges," with this additional injunction, "Compel them to come in." That is, entreat,—persuade,—urge,—constrain,—to induce the wretched to come,—"That my house may be filled." The whole concludes with the expressed displeasure of the Master of the feast, "that none of those which were first bidden, should taste of His supper." Here is intimated the rejection of the Jewish nation, which has been fearfully ratified by the centuries which have rolled round since that period.

Learn,

1. *That in the gospel, abundant provision is made for the spiritual wants of mankind.*

2. *That the invitations of divine mercy include all ranks and conditions of men.*

3. *That these invitations are free and full, and urgently and sincerely presented by the Lord Jesus Christ.*

4. *That only self-excluders will be refused a place at the feast of salvation.*

5. *That it is the duty and interest of all, immediately and gratefully to obey the invitation and sit down at the gracious banquet.*

No. XIX.

THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN.

“Hear another parable : There was a certain householder which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country : And when the time of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruit of it,” &c.—*Matt.* xxi. 33, 43.

THIS parable is an exposition of the privileges God had bestowed on the Jewish nation, and their abuse and perversion of blessings thus conferred. In this case we have a beautiful illustration of the importance of parabolical teaching, for by this means the Jews were constrained to convict and pass sentence on themselves, and to have the enormity of their wickedness forcibly and fully presented before them.

Observe,

I. THE PRIVILEGES CONFERRED. These are likened to the possession of a “vineyard, planted, hedged round about,” &c. v. 33. The Jews had a dispensation of light and mercy. They had ordinances,—a priesthood,—the oracles,—the Divine presence, care, protection and blessing. Everything needful to their national prosperity,—ecclesiastical purity, and spiritual happiness.

From the Jews, let us turn to ourselves. Think of our national elevation! Religious privileges, ordinances,—the word of God with all the promises and richer blessings of the gospel dispensation. How numerous too are many of our personal mercies. Pious parentage—religious friends, and unnumbered privileges, and blessings. “Line upon line,” &c. Observe,

II. HOW THESE PRIVILEGES WERE PERVERTED AND ABUSED. Notice,

1. *Their refusal to yield the fruits thereof to the rightful proprietor.* A portion of these fruits they had to yield to the owner ; and at the proper time he sent his servants to receive them. This was equitable and reasonable. But these demands they wickedly refused. Has not God a claim upon us ? Does he not require a suitable return for the privileges and benefits received ? But are these equitable claims duly met ? Met gratefully and faithfully ? By the constraining mercies of God, do we present ourselves a living sacrifice, which is our reasonable service.

2. *Their evil treatment of the messenger sent to them.* "And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another," &c. v. 35. These were literal facts in the history of the Jewish nation. Many of their prophets they put to death. Isaiah is said to have been sawn asunder. See Heb. xi. 37, &c. How often has it been the lot of God's faithful servants to be hated and persecuted, by those to whom they brought the message of salvation. This was the lot of most of the apostles, and first preachers of the cross of Christ. Of many of the early Protestant Reformers. Of the devoted Puritans, of the self-denying Nonconformists. Of Wesley and Whitfield, and the early Methodist preachers. Of many modern missionaries—Williams and Harris, and others. In our own country where the persons and property of Christian ministers are protected by law, yet what bitter hatred and scorn are often evinced by the sceptical, and profane rejectors of the gospel. Observe,

3. *Their murder of the heir.* "But last of all, he sent unto them his son, saying, they will reverence my son : But when they saw the son, they said, this is the heir, let us kill him," &c. v. 37, 38. On the part of the proprietor, we see the utmost forbearance, and his solicitude to obtain the tribute which they owed. He risked his own son. He con-

cluded that for him, they would have respect, and to him they would yield homage. But they filled up the measure of their iniquity, by basely putting him to death. How all this was predictive of the great act of Jewish hardness and infatuation, in crucifying the Lord of glory. See how Peter charges this murder upon them, Act ii. 23. How glaring and horrible this deed. And yet wilful sin and unbelief is crucifying the Lord afresh, and putting him to an open shame. Who is not then guilty of the death of Christ?

III. THE JUST PUNISHMENT WHICH THE JEWS DEEMED A RIGHTEOUS RETRIBUTION. The Saviour having presented this case, asked them, what will the Lord of the vineyard do unto those husbandmen? They replied, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men," &c. v. 41. Here they passed a righteous sentence on themselves. A sentence which was put into execution, when the Romans destroyed their city, and when they were cut off from the privileges which for thousands of years they had possessed. In this we have a sure exhibition of God's terrible wrath against all finally impenitent and incorrigible sinners. There can be no escape for those who despise the gospel, and neglect so great salvation.

Then Learn,

1. Rightly to estimate and improve your privileges.
2. Earnestly seek to obtain, and retain, the favour of the Lord.
3. And be ever prepared to surrender your accounts, and that with joy, and not with grief.

No. XX.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”—*Matt.* xiii 45, 46.

THIS short and beautiful parable is kindred in spirit and meaning, to the one which precedes it,—on the treasure hid in a field. No doubt, by the pearl, we are to understand the gospel, in its revelation of life eternal. But it will not be a wide departure from the scope of the parable, to consider Christ himself as the pearl, with which the gospel enriches all believers. Whatever grandeur, excellency, or preciousness their is in the gospel, it is entirely derived from Christ. The sweetest designation of the gospel is, that it is the gospel of Christ. He is its author, subject, and glory. So that he who receives the gospel, becomes the happy and rich possessor of this precious pearl. Let us then dwell a little,

I. ON THE SIMILITUDE. Wherefore may Christ be likened to a pearl,

1. *Pearls are of mysterious formation.* They are peculiar gems, found in the shells of a certain kind of oyster, chiefly in the eastern parts of the world. How applicable to the mysterious production of the humanity of Jesus, and to the mystery of his divine and human natures. The child of the virgin, and the son of God. Creator in our flesh, and the Lord of worlds in the fashion of a man. Mystery of mysteries. “Great is the mystery of godliness,” &c.

2. *Pearls are noted for their variety.* In this we have

both resemblance and dissimilarity. For there are in the world numerous pearls, but only one Saviour. God has sent many priests, and prophets, and righteous men. He has commissioned apostles and evangelists, &c. ; but there is only one divine, eternal, and infinitely glorious Redeemer. His name,—His office,—His work,—His glory is one,—the one mediator between God and man.

3. *Pearls are precious and valuable.* Hence the pearl in the text is described as of Great Price ! Who shall declare the worth of Jesus ? All titles—all similies—all calculations—all conceptions,—

“ All are too mean to shew his worth,
Too mean to set his glories forth.”

Think of his inherent dignity, and majesty, and glory. Think of the Father's estimate of him, as his own elect, beloved and only son ! Think of the esteem and love of angels, and their intense admiration of Christ ; and still the real preciousness of Christ, surpasseth knowledge. Observe,

II. HOW THIS PEARL IS OBTAINED.

1. *It is diligently sought for.* Hence the Christian is likened to a “ Merchantman seeking goodly pearls.” v. 45. Here is the spiritual pursuit of the soul after Christ. By the power of truth, the anxiety for salvation has been produced,—desire for the Saviour enkindled ; and directed by the unerring testimony,—the soul enquires for Christ,—mourns for Christ,—longs intensely for the manifestation of Christ. This seeking is the result of the proclamation of the gospel, and the direct effect of God's truth on the soul.

2. *All is sacrificed for its possession.* “ He sold all that he had.” Now, no one can merit the possession of Christ, or the enjoyment of saving grace. Christ is God's gift, and only as such can we receive him. We can only have the wine and milk of the gospel without money, and without price.

Yet, in another and equally consistent sense, all must be parted with to enjoy Him. All that may be denominated self. Self-righteousness and esteem,—self-love,—self-seeking; honors, and all worldly vain distinctions. All sinful pleasures, and gratifications. All things incompatible with the Saviour's love and favor. The soul itself must be yielded up to Christ. There must be a complete self-consecration. Rom. xii. 1. And thus only can we possess Christ. In losing all, we find Jesus. In renouncing everything else, we possess the peerless pearl. We would refer,

III. TO THE HAPPINESS AND ADVANTAGES OF THOSE WHO HAVE FOUND IT. In finding this pearl, they have found a portion for both worlds—riches for time and eternity.

1. *In Christ is all our need.* Think of the soul's wants—and they are all met in the Saviour. Ignorant, in Christ we have knowledge and wisdom. Naked, in Christ we have the robe of salvation. Hungry, he is the bread of life. Guilty, he is our pardon. Unholy, he is our righteousness. Wretched, he is our peace. Perishing, he is our deliverer and portion. To the soul who has found Christ, it may be said, "All are yours."

2. *In Christ is all the Christian's desire.* Every holy and spiritual desire terminates in Christ. Desires after holiness—after peace—after joy—after heaven, are all met in Christ. He sanctifies,—he preserves,—he delivers,—he glorifies.

3. *In Christ is the believer's eternal salvation.* He is the Christian's portion for ever,—his likeness will be borne forever,—his dwelling is an endless home,—his glories our ceaseless bliss,—his love our endless song. To see Him as he is, and be with Him, and enjoy Him, is eternal life. How great the treasure of having Christ! Rich indeed, are all such: "Heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Heirs of God's eternal kingdom and glory!

Then learn,

1. *The wisdom of true religion.* All else is folly—excuseless folly.

2 *The happiness of true believers.* How rich—how exalted—how blessed! By men they may be considered as the refuse of the world, but with these is true dignity and the reality of blessedness.

3. *Urge sinners to seek and to obtain this pearl.* To do so at any rate, at any loss.

4. *How infatuated those who neglect this precious Saviour.* Of those who prefer the world, and the pleasures of sin. Ah! meagre portion,—wretched choice! A present bauble, and eternal poverty, misery, and despair.

No. XXI.

THE WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS.

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish, &c.”—*Matt.* xxv 1, 13.

IN this most beautiful parable the character of Christ as a bridegroom, and the solemnity of the nuptial ceremony, are very graphically presented before us. This view of the Redeemer is often the subject of scriptural revelation. In the forty-fifth psalm, and other portions of the Old Testament writings, this figure is adopted and sustained. In the parable of the marriage of the king's son, the same idea is held forth. The apostle Paul adopts the same similitude, 2 Cor. xi. 2. And John, in the sublime visions of Patmos, refers to the church as the Lamb's wife. In this parable, however, while the character of Christ as bridegroom, and the consummation of

the marriage are clearly the leading events, yet we are especially directed to the character of those who were to grace the wedding with their personal presence. These are the ten virgins with which the parable commences. Let us then consider,

I. WHOM THE VIRGINS REPRESENT. Is it not evidently the visible kingdom of Christ, the professed followers and friends of Jesus? The figure employed, that of virgins, is intended to shew us the loveliness and purity of the friends of Jesus. In these virgins we look for a holy affection for Christ, and obedience to his authority. A profession of religion involves these two particulars in a pre-eminent degree. That we love Christ, and desire to exhibit that love in cheerful obedience to his sacred commands. All reasonable profession of religion includes of necessity these two things. Observe,

II. THE ESSENTIAL POINTS IN WHICH THESE VIRGINS DIFFERED FROM EACH OTHER.

1. *In the appellations given to them.* "Wise and foolish." (1.) The wise. The professions of the wise were valid. They were earnest, sincere. They professed Christ, and maintained that profession in reference to the future. They knew what it involved. That they would be expected to be found ready, prepared for the bridegroom's appearance. They were therefore prudent in making the requisite preparation. They prepared lamps, or torches, as was customary on such occasions. They also provided themselves with oil for any exigency which might occur. Their wisdom, in one word, consisted in preparing and acting for the future.

(2.) The foolish. These had lamps, but no provision of oil for the future. Their religious profession had only reference to the present. The great end was not duly contemplated, nor provision made for it. Wisdom fixes its attention on the most important things, and arranges chiefly and first for them. Not so shortsighted folly, which only gazes on

the present uncertain flitting now, and neglects to prepare for the sure and momentous future. A mere profession of religion may do for the flitting years of life, but will not for the realities of death, judgment, and eternity. Notice, we are referred,

III. TO THE PERIOD WHICH INTERVENED BETWEEN THE COMING OF THE BRIDEGROOM. "The bridegroom tarried." Did not appear so early as was expected. The second coming of Christ was expected by the Christians of the apostolic age. Hence Paul wrote to disabuse the minds of the early Christian as to his near approach. Since then, eighteen centuries have rolled over. So that from the commencement of the Christian dispensation to the second advent, it may be well certified, "that the bridegroom tarried." During this period, "they all slumbered and slept." This evidently refers to the sleep of death. One race and age of the church rose up and died after another. No other interpretation can meet the case clearly, for the same thing is said of both the wise and foolish, and without any blame being attached to it. It is obvious that both the wise and foolish died as they had lived. The one in union with Christ, and waiting ready for Him. The other with only a nominal profession. At length the slumbers of the whole are disturbed. For notice,

IV. THE MOMENTOUS PROCLAMATION. "Behold the bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet him:" ver. 6. This takes place at midnight, when the day of the world's probation has passed away. At "midnight," before the day of eternity dawns.

(1.) How sublime the announcement! "Behold the bridegroom cometh." In all his grandeur and magnificence. In all his pomp and glory. Cometh as predicted. Cometh to consummate his kingdom.

(2.) How important the command! "Go ye out to meet him." For this they have been long waiting. And now

they all wake and startle into life. The slumbers of the world are disturbed. But the dead in Christ rise first. Now,—now is the grand crisis. The day of destiny and doom.

(3.) How active the arrangements! ver. 7. “Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.” What anxiety and care will press on every mind. It is clear that the foolish virgins were not hypocrites, but formalists. They were not deceivers, but self-deceived; for they earnestly attempt to make ready for the bridegroom’s appearance. Notice,

V. THE SOLEMN DIFFERENCE NOW DISCOVERED.

(1.) The foolish have no oil. Their mere profession died with them, and now they have no real grace, and therefore cannot join in the nuptial procession. The wise trim their lamps, and go forth as they had *prepared*, as they had *desired*, as they had *expected*. This difference is now first discovered. But discovered when it is too late. “The harvest is past,” &c. The means of mercy past. The day of probation ended. They attempt to buy in vain. The wise have no oil,—no grace,—no merit,—no righteousness to benefit others, and therefore their ruin is inevitable.

(2.) The foolish are excluded. The wise enter in with the bridegroom. Now their faith is realized in sight. Now their hope in eternal fruition. Now they are for ever with the Lord. But the foolish are excluded. “The door was shut.” How terrible that short sentence! The door shut, and that for ever. Shut, and they excluded. And their appeals are in vain,—for they cry “Lord, Lord,” &c. But the asseveration is heard, “Verily, I know you not,” ver. 12. I never recognized you as more than professors: mine ye never were. I cannot approve of you, or own you now. Let solemn preparation be made for eternity. Let the Christian live for that. Prepare for that. Do all things in reference to that. Apply the subject with ver. 13.

No. XXII.

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey,” &c.—*Matt.* xxv. 14, 30.

IN this extended parable we have presented to us in full, the doctrine of human responsibility, and the connection between the condition of the present and the condition of the future. These subjects are among the essentials of religion. They deserve our solemn consideration, and are adapted to produce those impressions which are favourable to our highest and eternal interests. We shall not attempt any explanation of the drapery of the parable, but make use of it to illustrate the important propositions we shall place before you. Observe,

I. THAT GOD COMMITS CERTAIN TALENTS TO HIS CREATURES: ver. 14. Of the most important of these we may mention,

1. *Life.* The time and circumstances of our being.

2. *Reason.* The power to judge between right and wrong, that which can apprehend causes and effects, duties and their obligations.

3. *Influence.* Power arising from our rank, or station, or knowledge.

4. *Wealth.* For of money the wise man saith, it answereth all things. The instrumentality by which all benevolent machinery is established and continued.

5. *Religious privileges.* The word. The preached gospel. Sabbaths. Ordinances. Graces. Providences, &c. &c.

II. THAT VARIETY BOTH IN CHARACTER AND NUMBER DISTINGUISHES THE TALENTS GOD CONFERS: ver. 15.—To some he gave five, to others two, and to another one We see this,

1. *In the nature of the talents conferred.* In one case in addition to the ordinary blessings and privileges of life, there is given profound learning,—to another commanding eloquence,—to a third great energy,—to a fourth the spirit of enterprize, &c. One has wealth, another useful parts, a third influence, &c. There is as great a difference between the talents of men as between one and five.

2. *In the capability for using them.* “To every man according to his several ability,” ver. 15. God suits the talents bestowed to the characteristics of the mind, the sphere occupied, and the mental or physical ability possessed. With the talents conferred, there is ability to use them ever given.

III. THAT GOD WILL REQUIRE AN EXACT ACCOUNT OF THE EMPLOYMENT OF OUR TALENTS.

1. *This is the great doctrine of revelation.* It meets us in every part of the sacred volume, Eccl. xi. 13, 14. To this also conscience responds. This is essential to accountability.

2. *God will do this at the day of judgment.* “After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh,” &c. “Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world,” &c. Acts xvii. 31.

3. *This account will be demanded from every one.* None too great to evade,—none too small to escape. Every man of every grade, and colour, and condition, and age, and tongue. The dead, small and great, will stand before the throne.

IV. THAT MEN WILL BE JUDGED ACCORDING TO THE TALENTS BESTOWED.

1. *Improvement will be expected from each.* For this

the talents were given. And to this every one must answer. Have they been laid out actively and conscientiously according to the ability and opportunities given?

2. *The improvement expected will be proportionate.*

(1.) To the number of talents. Where much is given, &c.

(2.) To the time of possession.

(3.) To the favourable circumstances under which they have been enjoyed. Fidelity in the use, and consequent thereon, an increase of the talents will be the test. For in all cases faithful use increases the talents given. He who hath been diligent and active, and conscientious, increases the talents bestowed. Daily, more to him is given.

V. GOD WILL REWARD HIS FAITHFUL SERVANTS ACCORDING TO THE IMPROVEMENT MADE. See this fully borne out in Luke's version of this parable: chap. xix. 16. &c. The man who had gained ten talents, had rule given him over ten cities. The man who had gained five, over five cities. There can be no doubt as to there being degrees of glory among the beatified. "As one star differeth," &c. Besides, faithfulness in God's service, and usefulness to our fellow-men, increases our capacity for bliss. And the capacity in every case will be the rule of the glory conferred. In all cases the reward,

1. *Will be rich and distinguished.* Worthy of God to give. Such as his greatness and all-sufficiency can bestow. He hath called us to his "eternal kingdom and glory."

2. *Will be satisfying.* Soul filled with intellectual, holy enjoyment. "Joy of our Lord," ver. 23, &c.

3. *It will be eternal.* "Fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore," &c. These shall enter into life eternal.

VI. GOD WILL PUNISH THE UNFAITHFUL AND SLOTHFUL WITH HIS SEVERE DISPLEASURE. He will,

1. *Overthrow his sophistry.* He excuses himself on the ground of his fear and dread, ver. 25. On that very ground

Christ shews he should have been concerned anxiously, to improve his talent, ver. 26.

2. *He will expose him to public shame.* The examination is public. Angels are present. The whole human family are present. Before all he will convict and condemn him. The assembled world shall hear the charge, "Thou wicked and slothful servant."

3. *He will consign him to a state of misery.* His portion and Crown are given to another, ver. 28. He is then seized by the administrators of divine justice, and cast into outer darkness," &c., ver. 30. His doom is one of intense misery and despair.

Learn,

1. *The importance of faithful constancy and diligence in the service of God.* God says to each Christian, "Occupy till I come." Be faithful, &c.

2. *Exemption from flagrant sins will not save us.* There must be fruitfulness, &c.

3. *The ruined individual* was a servant, not a rebel, nor enemy. Oh, reflect and tremble.

No. XXIII.

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

"And he said unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, who had a steward: and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward," &c.—*Luke xvi. 1, 8.*

It is obvious that this parable must be read with care, that its design and purport may be correctly ascertained. Jesus here is not extolling the dishonesty of the unjust steward;

nor yet does he inculcate in the conclusion, the possibility that by any meritorious works, we can assure ourselves of final felicity. The whole scope of the parable is to teach wise, prudent forethought. And this is all that was commendable in the unjust steward. He calculated, arranged, and acted for the future. He had wasted his lord's goods. He was unable to toil for his daily food. He was ashamed to beg. He therefore resolved by favouring to a large extent his lord's debtors, in the settlement of their accounts, to obtain such a share of their good will, that in the time of necessity he saw approaching, he might be received into their houses. The lord heard of the sagacity and tact of his unfaithful servant, and while he must have detested his dishonesty, he yet admired the skill and prudence he had displayed. Jesus therefore attests that as a rule, the children of this world are wiser in their generation, than the children of light. He concludes by saying, that his disciples should make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when they failed on earth, they might receive them into everlasting habitations. It is supposed by many that Christ here refers to the benevolent use of wealth in doing good to his poor disciples, who would hail their benefactors with joy to the abodes of the blessed. Then Christ will say to such, "I was hungry and ye gave me meat," &c. The great motto of the parable is,—live in reference to eternity. In doing this,

I. KEEP THE EYE OF YOUR MIND CONSTANTLY FIXED UPON IT. As the racer on the goal. As the mariner on his port. As the labourer on the end of the day. As the traveller on his home. Daily remember you are on your way to eternity. Soon you will have to do with eternal things. Think of them in the workshop,—in the market,—in the domestic circle,—in secret. On your beds, &c. Let this be one chief subject of meditation and reflection,

II. ACT FOR ETERNITY. (1.) Lay a good foundation by

building on the Lord Jesus Christ alone, and resting exclusively on him for pardon, sanctification, and eternal life.

(2.) Labour to grow in meetness for eternity. Cherish the spirit, and graces, and virtues, which will flourish in the celestial regions of glory. Seek for an entire conformity to God's will and likeness. Be heavenly and spiritually minded. Lay up treasure there, &c.

(3.) Let your conduct have reference to it. In worldly things act as a citizen of the New Jerusalem. As a Christian more especially, let your destination be recognized of all men. Shew your pilgrim's staff and costume. Be ever on your way, &c.

III. ACT WITH THAT SKILL AND ENERGY WHICH ETERNAL CONCERNS DESERVE.

(1.) See how worldly men contrive and toil for earthly gain,—how much more you for eternal riches.

(2.) For what a little they make immense sacrifices,—how grand the object you have before you,—your self-denial and earnest efforts cannot be too great.

(3.) How they persevere and overcome difficulties. Be as intent on your labours, and as strenuous,—determined and unwavering.

(4.) How anxious are they to improve all opportunities. Be you as wise and watchful,—avail yourselves of all means of getting and doing good. Be especially moved to this course by the consideration,

1. *Of the uncertainty of the present.* Your period of probation is exceedingly limited, and its termination may be just at hand. Much may have to be crowded into a few months, or weeks, or days. What diligence and fervour then are necessary.

2. *Of the momentous character of the future.* Eternal things are solid, unchanging realities. Heaven and its glory is eternal. Hell and its woe is eternal. And in eternity there is no reparation of life's woful mistakes. No

available repentance there. No door of hope there. No throne of grace there. No purifying fountain there. Then while we have these, what concern and diligence should be evinced!

IV. UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES PREFER ETERNAL TO TEMPORARY GOOD. Eternal prosperity to evanescent earthly prosperity. Eternal glory to earthly glory. Eternal pleasures to those of sin and sense. Eternal mansions to those of time, having their foundations in the dust. Keep in mind the wisdom of looking at the unseen realities of eternity, in preference to the temporal vanities of time.

APPLICATION.

1. *Commend the conduct of those who are thus wise and prudent in reference to eternal things.*

2. *Encourage them.* Their reward is nearer every day. Soon shall wisdom be justified of her children. Soon shall the wise shine forth in the kingdom of their Father for ever.

3. *Urge the worldly to a better choice.* Why be absorbed with sublunary good? It is the portion of the beasts of the field. Seek something higher, better, holier,—more suited to your faculties, and more adapted to the immortality of your being.

4. *Press consideration on the thoughtless.* “O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.”

No. XXIV.

THE RICH FOOL.

“And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?” &c.—*Luke* xii. 16,—21.

THIS parable originated in consequence of an individual applying to Christ, that he would adjudicate between him and one of his brethren in reference to the family inheritance. This would have been a direct departure from the spiritual province the Saviour came to occupy; and therefore he replied, “Man, who made me a judge or a divider among you,” v. 14. And seeing the anxiety of this individual respecting the attainment of an earthly possession, he said, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,” ver. 15. This important principle he illustrates by the parable before us. Observe,

I. THE RICH MAN’S POSSESSIONS: ver. 16. “The ground of a rich man brought forth plentifully.” He was in circumstances of affluence, rich and prosperous. Just in that condition which men are anxious to attain. The sun of prosperity shone upon him. The gales of prosperity filled the canvass of his vessel, and her gallant course was all that heart could desire. This is often the lot of the thoughtless and the ungodly. So that temporal prosperity is never a sure indication either of piety, or irreligion. In this respect one event happeneth to all. Observe,

II. HIS ANXIETIES. Some imagine that anxiety is only the

lot of the poor and the wretched, and such as have to buffet with the waves of adversity. The very opposite is generally the case. Anxieties are generally found in proportion to the amount of our earthly possessions. Riches and cares are inseparably wedded together. Hence though rich and prosperous, he exclaims, "What shall I do?" We marvel not that the poor and starving, that the widow and the orphan, that the distressed and unfortunate should thus exclaim, but this is the language of a man of abounding affluence. He knows not how to dispose of his abundance. "I have no room where to bestow my fruits." I am full to overflowing. I cannot keep pace in my hoarding arrangements, with the increase of my substance. He surely had forgotten that the fruits of the earth were for the inhabitants of the earth, and that this superabundance was to enable him to give to the poor and needy, and such as were born for adversity. We see too, that no degree of prosperity can soften or expand a sordid or selfish heart. We see too, how he speaks as the proprietor, and not as the steward of his possessions. I have no room for *my fruit*, what shall *I* do? He recognizes no superior authority,—he refers to no will but his own. How few remember that riches are only given in trust. And that God says to every one, "Occupy till I come." Observe,

III. HIS DETERMINATIONS. "And he said, this will I do; I will pull down my barns and build greater," v. 19, 20.

1. *He resolves on the means of accumulation.* He will cherish the sordid, grasping feeling. He will add to his already oppressive abundance. Avarice, like the sea and the grave, never says it has enough. Like the horse leech, it ever craves, "Give, give!"

2. *He forms his arrangements without any reference to the providence of God.* He says, "I will pull down my barns," &c. He reckons on no contingencies. He calculates on no changes. He is as self-confident as he is rich. He thinks he can dispose of events as easily as of riches. He

fancies time and years to be as malleable as gold. He does not even say, that he will *endeavour* to do these things, but he confidently declares that he will do them.

3. *He reckons on his riches as the joy and portion of his soul.* "And I will say to my soul, soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years," &c. His mind was evidently gross and carnal. His affections earthly. His gold was his idol. He evidently was ignorant that mere material things could not satisfy the mental desires of an immaterial spirit. The fruits of the earth would do well enough to meet many physical necessities, but what could they do, in meeting the boundless longings of a deathless soul? How would he extract from wealth, light for his understanding,—truth for his judgment,—peace for his conscience,—or solid hopes for his immortal desires and delights? What stupidity! What infatuation! Yet is not this the very spirit of worldliness—seeking the chief good in the creature, and not in the Creator, having the affections on the earth, instead of in heaven?

4. *He confidently calculates on an extended existence.* "Thou hast goods laid up for many years," ver. 19. Many years of plenty and enjoyment are before thee. Be content, satisfied, happy. All things are right and secure,—no interruption, no molestation shall affect me. What folly! Did he not know that no man could reckon with certainty as to-morrow—that the wisest cannot tell what a day will bring forth? That man's breath is in his nostrils—That man is travelling every moment on the margin of the grave? Yet this infatuated scheme of reckoning on long life, how common it is. Men buy and sell, and build, and form plans, as if they held life on a certain and long protracted term of years. Notice,

IV. HIS SUDDEN AND FATAL ARRESTMENT. It might seem that this colloquy with himself had taken place on his bed. During the commencement of the night season. Having finished the process of his purposes and resolves, he

now probably thinks of sleep, intending to commence his new improvements on the morrow. But observe,

1. *How he is disturbed by the voice of Deity.* "God said," either by some deep, unmistakeable impression on his heart and conscience, or by some sudden infliction of disease. "Thou fool," &c. What an interruption to his castle building! What an unexpected leveller of his plans! How soon the aspect of the whole scene is changed!

Mark,

2. *The sudden termination of his career.* "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." Thy race is run,—thy probation ended. Thou art on the verge of the eternal world. This night,—how soon,—how unexpected,—how awful!

3. *The eternal ruin of his soul.* He had lived for time and for earthly ends. His soul and eternal things had been utterly neglected. Alas! how poor is he now. How wretched! How despairing! He thought he was happy and secure. But he had built upon the sand, and all, by one fell storm is swept away. And his soul is lost—lost—lost for ever. Oh, reflect, be wise, and lay up treasure in heaven, &c.

No. XXV.

THE BARREN FIG TREE.

"He spake also this parable: A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none: Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" &c.—*Luke* xiii. 6,—9.

It is probable that Christ designed this parable to be admonitory to the Jews, whose mercies had been so numerous,

but whose day of privileges would soon terminate. But the subject is equally applicable to all persons who are favored with the means of religious knowledge and improvement. How important that we should live constantly, and deeply impressed with our responsibility to God, for all we enjoy. That we should remember always, that this is a probationary state. That eternity will be to us in all its enjoyments, or woes, as we sow here. And, therefore, that we should so improve our blessings, that our account may be surrendered with joy, and not with grief. Observe,

I. THE FAVORABLE POSITION IN WHICH THE FIG TREE WAS PLACED. In a "vineyard,"—not on some neglected waste ground. Not by the way side. But in a vineyard. Under culture and care. With all the advantages of the vine-dresser's skill, &c. This was the highly favoured condition of the Jews for many generations. See Isaiah v. 1, &c. This is the condition of those favored with the privileges and blessings of the gospel dispensation. This is especially the condition of those who are members of the Christian church.

(1.) Who have been professedly brought out of the world into the church.

(2.) Who are favoured with the spiritual means and ordinances of the gospel.

(3.) Who are the subjects of the especial and rich promises of the new covenant.

(4.) Unto whom the graces and blessed influences of the Holy Spirit are freely imparted.

(5.) Who are the objects of the Divine care and complacency. We are directed,

II. TO THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE PROPRIETOR. He came seeking fruit, v. 6. This expectation was reasonable. The vine is a fruitful plant. Under cultivation, it is expected to yield a due increase. God expected this from the Jews. He required them to be more wise, and holy, and obedient, than the heathen who surrounded them. God requires

this from all favored with the privileges and blessings of the gospel economy. He particularly requires, and expects it from his own professing people—the members of his church. He expects,

1. *Their hearts to yield the fruits of holy graces.* These are specified by the apostle Paul, Gal. v. 22, &c. He expects,

2. *Their lips to yield the fruit of thanksgiving and praise.* The sanctified mouth glorifies God, and extols him. Celebrates his praises, &c. From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. And the stream of the lips, is to evidence the nature of the fountain within. He expects,

3. *The fruits of obedience in the life.* The fruits of righteousness to the glory of his grace. That to faith will be added virtue, temperance, &c., &c. That the life shall be regulated by the Divine law, and conformed to the Divine mind. Subject to God's gracious and holy authority. That they be servants of righteousness.

4. *The fruits of usefulness, by the employment of their powers and talents, in his service.* That the powers, and gifts, and blessings conferred, will be laid out and improved. True love to God, will lead to a desire to serve him, and glorify him in the world. Love to mankind, which is an essential part of religion, will lead to active exertion to save our fellow creatures. Observe,

III. THE PROPRIETOR'S DISAPPOINTMENT. "Behold these three years, I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none," v. 7. We marvel not at his disappointment. He had sought fruit year after year, and there had been none. It is said, that a tree not yielding fruit for three years, was considered barren. He found no fruit thereon. No fruit of any quality. No fruit. Not one branch, or cluster, did this tree bear. It might be strong and green, but it was barren. To the Jews, this literally applied. To myriads under the gospel dispensation. And to how many, alas! who

are professors in the church,—the absence of every grace and virtue God seeks and demands. Notice,

IV. THE COMMAND THE PROPRIETOR ISSUES. “Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?” v. 7.

1. *This sentence was not a hasty one.* There had been three years care, and labor, and forbearance. God exercised his great long suffering towards the Jews. So to men in general. So to fruitless professors in the church. To all, God manifests patient, and enduring forbearance. Not willing to destroy, but desirous to save. Hence, he waits long to see if they will bear fruit or not.

2. *A sufficient reason is assigned for the order given.* “Why cumbereth it the ground?” It was worthless in itself. It occupied precious ground. It took up the nutritive portions of the soil, that useful fruitful trees required. So was it with the Jews. So is it with all unfruitful professors. Their influence is worse than useless—it is pernicious to others. Notice at this crisis,

V. THE REQUEST THE VINE DRESSER PRESENTS. “He said, Lord, let it alone this year also,” &c. v. 8. He denies not the allegations of the owner. He vindicates not the final continuance of the tree. But he entreats,

1. *For a short period of suspense of the sentence.* One year. One year only! One round of the seasons. One year’s showers and sunshine.

2. *He engages to give it special attention.* “I will dig about it, and dung it,” v. 8. I will try and search out the cause, and use all reasonable means to remedy it. He further adds,

3. *His willingness then to obey the order of the proprietor.* This is not only implied, but directly stated. “If it bear fruit, well.” Well for the tree, the proprietor, and the vine dresser; “And if not, then thou shalt cut it down,” v. 9.

This pleading for the cumberer has often been verified in the prayers of the parent, the friend, the minister; but it is

true in the highest and best sense of the Lord Jesus. He ever lives to intercede. He prayed for his murderers on earth. He mediates for a lost world in heaven. Our being—our privileges—our gracious calls all flow to us through Him. Through the virtue of His sacerdotal influence, the axe may have been stayed in its descent—the affliction removed—the life prolonged. But remember, the suspended blow, is not pardon—not acceptance—not salvation. Without repentance, faith, fruitfulness, the sentence will be put into fearful execution.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let the subject lead to serious self-examination. Am I in the vineyard of the Lord a fruitful tree, or a cumberer of the ground?*

2. *Let the formalist be awakened to a deep concern for his soul's salvation.*

3. *Let all remember the great end of life, is to glorify God, and finally obtain eternal blessedness.*

No. XXVI.

RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

(1ST SKETCH.)

“There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, full of sores,” &c.—*Luke* xvi. 19, 22.

THIS is confessedly the most awful of all the Saviour’s parables. It is worthy of notice how repeatedly Christ adverted to the doctrines of future rewards and punishments. No other teacher ever said more concerning death and judgment, and eternity,—concerning heaven and hell, than Jesus. In this parable, as in many others, two individuals are brought before us in contrast, and the contrast is sustained throughout. It begins in time, and is carried out into the future state. The whole is so graphic and forcible, that some have supposed it to be the language of narration and not of parable. In either case the great truths presented must be the same, and to these let us with the utmost seriousness of spirit direct our attention. Observe,

I. THE RICH MAN IN HIS AFFLUENCE AND ENJOYMENTS. Most probably he was rich by descent. Owned some magnificent family inheritance. At any rate his means were abundant. He had riches in profusion. At the greatest possible distance from earthly want or dependency. Hence there is reference made,

1. *To his costume.* “Clothed in purple and fine linen,” v. 19. Articles of dress of the most costly kind, and such as could be worn only by one of the *grandees* of the earth.

2. *To his style of living.* Doubtless a splendid mansion the place of his residence. "And he fared sumptuously every day." Hence his hall would be one continued scene of banquetting and gaiety. One round of sensual enjoyments. Luxuriousness the order of every day. Observe,

II. LAZARUS IN HIS POVERTY. Here we have the greatest possible contrast before us. For Lazarus,

1. *Was a beggar.* One without any earthly dependency. One whose wants were to be supplied by the precarious generosity of others. No inheritance,—no sure provision laid up for a single day. A child of deep need,—one evidently born for adversity. He was anxious for the crumbs of the rich man's table.

2. *Without a dwelling.* He was homeless. Had not even a mud walled cottage for his habitation. For he was laid at the rich man's gate. The mere animals belonging to the mansion fared better than he. Like the Lord of life and glory, he had not where to lay his head. To the piercing cold,—to the teeming rain,—to the painful frost of night, and to every peril and wretchedness, he was exposed.

3. *He was miserably afflicted in his person.* "Full of sores," ver. 20. Most likely lame and helpless, and distressed with painful and loathsome ulcers. Probably his extreme poverty might result from his diseased condition, being unable to toil for the bread which perisheth. "Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores," ver. 21. We are directed,

III. TO THE DEATH OF LAZARUS. "And it came to pass, that the beggar died," ver. 22. We marvel not at this, but rather that he had lived, when his misery and destitution are considered. His poverty and afflictions probably hastened his death. He died as he had lived,—poor, forlorn, and neglected. But at his death he became the subject,

1. *Of angelic ministrations.* Those bright, and holy, and benevolent spirits, the immediate servants of God in heaven,

who are ever hearkening to the voice of his word, were sent to watch the dying agonies of the neglected beggar. No earthly hand is near to close his eyes,—no earthly bosom to heave with tender sympathy. But angels witness his last struggles, and might be commissioned to administer celestial consolation.

2. *He is conveyed in triumph to glory.* He exchanges earth for heaven,—poverty for celestial riches,—and disease and destitution, for ineffable joy and blessedness. How striking, how indescribable the change! God's saint, who had no dwelling on earth, is now a citizen, a prince royal of immortal glory. Of his funeral we have no account,—what became of the diseased, worn-out tabernacle, is not stated; but the soul, the deathless part of the beggar, is beatified. We are now directed,

IV. TO THE DEMISE OF THE RICH MAN. "The rich man also died and was buried," ver. 22. As the beggar had died of destitution, who knows but the rich man had died of repletion. For the one is almost as unfavourable to health and longevity as the other. At any rate,

1. *He died.* Riches, affluence, earthly glory, could not ward off disease, nor prevent the fatal stroke of mortality, In spite of friends and physicians, the enemy of our species directed the fatal dart with unerring precision. Observe, it is recorded,

2. *That he was buried.* Rank and wealth keep up their distinctions after death, in the magnificence of the funeral obsequies,—in the marble monument,—in the flattering inscription, and eulogy on the deceased. But this is the utmost stretch of earthly distinction, unless some dependant writer immortalizes his name and deeds in song, or on the pages of his country's history. We have now surveyed the leading features in the earthly history of these two individuals. We have seen them pass away from the scenes of time. We look for them, but they are not. Another lord

tenants the mansion, and the beggar no longer is seen prostrate at the family gate. Both are gone,—for both, after all, were travellers to the same home. Their final state we must reserve for another occasion. We learn,

1. *That piety on earth is often allied with poverty and suffering.*

2. *That earthly prosperity and magnificence are no proofs of the divine favour.*

3. *That whatever be our condition in this world, we are travelling towards another.* Here we have no abiding. This is not the final abode of either rich or poor.

4. *That death is inevitable to all stations and ranks.* How necessary to remember this. To prepare for it, by a life of sanctity, and devotedness to the cause of God in the world.

No. XXVII.

RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

(2ND SKETCH.)

“And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame,” &c.—*Luke* xvi. 23,—31.

OUR attention has been directed to the rich man and Lazarus in their opposite circumstances of life, and in their decease; and in those particulars were found much weighty matter for serious reflection. Life is important in itself, but how much more in its vast responsibility in connection with

eternity. What I am now may concern both myself and others,—but the all-momentous question is, what shall I be in eternity? What shall be my future condition,—what my endless portion? Poverty or affliction is endurable with the prospect of eternal blessedness, and surely riches and sensual pleasures can have no attraction if they are linked inseparably with endless woes. We have now to follow the rich man and Lazarus into the eternal world. The Saviour has drawn aside the curtain, and we are permitted to behold them in their fixed estates as the inhabitants of eternal things. Notice,

I. WE SEE LAZARUS IN THE ABODES OF THE BLESSED. Angels had conveyed him into “Abraham’s bosom.” This is a description of heaven having peculiar charms for the Jewish hearer. To be with the father of the faithful, their nation’s sire. And in his bosom amid the festivities of the heavenly banquet. As John was in the bosom of Jesus at the eucharistic supper. His condition in Abraham’s bosom was one,

(1.) Of repose after the toils of life.

(2.) Of dignity after the humiliating scenes of his earthly adversity.

(3.) Of abundance after want.

(4.) Of bliss after many griefs and sorrows. And this heavenly estate was permanent and eternal.

II. WE ARE REFERRED TO DIVES AS CONSIGNED TO THE REGIONS OF THE LOST. “And in hell,” &c. v. 23.

It is not said how he came there. Whether any spirits the administrators of God’s vengeance, were employed to drag him thither. One of our sacred poets thus enquires,

“Will angel hands convey,
 Their brother to the bar,
 Or devils drag my soul away,
 To meet its sentence there?”

He then truly adds,

“I must from God be driven,
Or with my Saviour dwell,
Must come at his command to heaven,
Or else—depart to hell.”

His condition is described as one of extreme suffering. “Being in torments,” v. 23.

(1.) Torments arising from the awful change he had experienced when death removed him from his wealth and luxuries on earth.

(2.) Torments from unallayed desires. He seeks now even for one drop of water, but in vain. He doubtless has all his innate feelings and established habits, and loves banqueting and ease; but the power of gratification is for ever gone.

(3.) Torments from the bitter and despairing anguish of his doomed spirit.

(4.) Torments of keen self-reproach.

(5.) Torments from the direct infliction of the righteous wrath of God.

(6.) Torments from having the world of joy and glory within the range of his distracted vision.

III. WE ARE REMINDED OF HIS UNAVAILING PRAYERS.

1. *For the alleviation of his own agonies.* “Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger,” v. 24. But to this Abraham replies, that he had all his enjoyments in his lifetime. That he had chosen earth and earthly things for his God and portion, and that now an eternal lease of evil is his inevitable inheritance. He shews too, how Lazarus now has an inheritance of comfort and blessedness. He also reminds him that there is now no intercommunion between the good and the bad, the saved and the lost. The two worlds are separated with an impassable gulf, v. 26.

2. *For additional means to save his brethren.* He desires Lazarus to be commanded to go to his father's house to "testify unto them," v. 28. Whether from compassion or from dread of his own misery being increased by their presence he presented this prayer, we know not. But this also was in vain, and though he repeated his request it was peremptorily rejected. "They have Moses and the prophets," being deemed a sufficient reason for the refusal of the request. And the solemn declaration, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets," &c. v. 31.

Learn,

1. *How awful it is to die in a carnal, unregenerate state.*

2. *How connected are the concerns of time with the realities of eternity.* "Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap."

3. *How all-important is real personal piety.* A new heart, the enjoyment of God's favours, and a title and meetness for eternal glory.

4. *The sufficiency of the means appointed for man's salvation.* Moses and the prophets, and Christ, and the apostles. The sacrifice of Christ, the word, and the spirit. All things needful are ready and offered.

No. XXVIII.

THE UNJUST JUDGE.

"And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint: Saying, There was in a city a judge, who feared not God, neither regarded man," &c.—*Luke xviii. 1,—8.*

THE one great purport of this parable is, to urge and vindicate the importance of earnest importunate prayer. The exercise of prayer is confessedly essential to true religion.

The hindrances to prayer are many. Hence, many fail in carrying out the exercise and habit of spiritual devotion. Many too are the subjects of depression, and are liable even to distrust God, in reference to answers to prayer. They ask with apprehension, or with little faith—doubting. Now to excite to prayer, and to induce to persevering prayer, is the design of this parable. The success of the widow is to be the ground of our expectation and success. If she persevered and succeeded, under circumstances so very unpropitious, shall not we obtain our suit, with so many favourable things to encourage us? For observe,

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE JUDGE TO WHOM SHE APPEALED. He was an unprincipled person, neither fearing God, nor regarding man, v. 2. Who had no regard to the Divine laws, nor feared the displeasure of Jehovah. And who was so base and abandoned as to have no self-respect, nor caring for the esteem of those around him; for neither did he regard man. The popular favour had no attractions. The popular indignation no influence with him. He was desperate, lost to all sense of right and wrong. One who debased his office, and made self and iniquity the occupants of the judicial seat. Yet with this man, the woman succeeded. If so, think of the being we address in prayer. The Holy One of Israel. The just and true God. Whose throne is based on righteousness. Whose laws and ways are all pure, and just, and good. Whose administrations are all wise, and equitable, and perfect. But more than this, remember the Divine goodness. His infinite immeasurable love. His boundless grace and benignity. His generous desire for the happiness of his intelligent offspring. The evidences too of his bounty and mercy, in the arrangements of providence, especially in the exceeding riches of his grace, in sending his Son to die for our sins, &c. Observe,

II. THE PERSON OF THE APPLICANT. "A widow." One without rank, or influence, or wealth. One probably a stran-

ger, without a friend to introduce her, or to plead for her. Yet she succeeded with this judge. Then turn from the widow and her state in reference to the judge, and think of the praying believer and his relation to God, the object of his supplications. God is the friend of the suppliant. He is his gracious father. His merciful Redeemer. Their connexion is close, and intimate, and kind. They are united in covenant and mutual love. God delights in them, and they delight in God. They are one by solemn covenant,—a covenant ratified by the blood of the cross. Surely then, the Christian shall be heard in his prayers and supplications. Observe,

III. THE ENGAGEMENTS GOD HAS ENTERED INTO IN REFERENCE TO PRAYER. The unjust judge was wearied out. For the sake of ease and quiet, he granted her request. But God will assuredly regard his people's prayer,

(1.) Because of his titles. He is the revealed hearer and answerer of prayer. As such, he has proclaimed himself to his saints.

(2.) Because of his promises. These are presented in every possible form and variety. He has given these in great number. They are almost beyond enumeration. They are most express, and direct, and absolute. The honour and glory of God are concerned in their fulfilment. "They are all yea, and amen," &c. "Whosoever asketh, receiveth," &c. These are the promises of God, "who cannot lie."

(3.) Because of his arrangements. The laws of his spiritual kingdom are as fixed and unalterable, as those of the physical parts of the universe. He has set up the ordinance of prayer, as the medium through which he will be exalted, and his people blessed and saved. It is an appointment full of wisdom and love. We would urge the great object of the parable,

IV. FROM THE VALUE OF THE BLESSINGS WE SUPPLICATE. This widow desired to be avenged of her adversary.

That is, to have justice in some secular matter of litigation. Her importunity was manifested to obtain some earthly good. Then how much more importunate should God's people be, for the attainment of the precious blessings of life and salvation. The blessings we seek in prayer,

- (1.) Are inexpressibly precious.
- (2.) Necessary to our present happiness.

(3.) And essential to eternal salvation. The soul in all its capacities and desires, both for time and eternity is concerned. How earnestly—how eagerly—how importunately should we seek the blessings of the well ordered covenant. The conclusion of the parable clearly shows that God will avenge the quarrel of his people. Thus he reckons their enemies as his own, and their ultimate overthrow is certain. His "elect," his chosen believing children, shall not plead in vain. The question also asked, whether when the Son of Man cometh he shall find faith on the earth,—may refer either to the saints who may be tempted to doubt the approaching advent of their Lord and deliverer, or to the general unbelief of men, as to that great and momentous event.

Learn,

1. The nature of prevalent prayer.
 2. The importance of earnest importunity and perseverance.
 3. The certainty that acceptable prayer shall be effectual.
- "Therefore, men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

No. XXIX.

THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray: the one a pharisee, and the other a publican. The pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican,” &c.—*Luke* xviii. 10, 14.

PRIDE is inherent in the human heart. It was one of the great elements in the first sin. Man would be as God, and therefore he took of the fruit which was to give him knowledge equal to His. The fall of the angelic host most probably originated in the same feeling of self-exaltation. Its general prevalence is obvious to the most superficial observer. In the world we see it without disguise or affected concealment. In the church it often appears under the semblance of humility. There is often the garb of abasement worn by those, who manifestly possess the spirit of self-righteous approbation. To guard against this,—to see its odiousness,—to observe how God despises it,—is the end and scope of the parable before us. It is introduced with this emphatic declaration, “And he spake this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves,” &c. v. 9. To expose the evil, and to warn them of its consequences. Let us then,

I. EXAMINE THE PORTRAIT DRAWN OF THE PHARISEE.
And,

II. OBSERVE THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF THE PUBLICAN. And,

III. THE DIVINE TREATMENT OF BOTH. Let us then,

I. EXAMINE THE PORTRAIT DRAWN OF THE PHARISEE.

1. *The pharisee was a public professor of religion.* One of avowed habits of sanctity, &c. Known and recognized as a religious man.

2. *He belonged to the strictest of all religious sects.* They professed extraordinary piety. Not only did they conform to the letter of the law, but added thereunto numerous acts of devotion and self-denial. In prayers, fasts, almsgiving, &c., they greatly surpassed all other religious parties. In conformity with this profession we behold,

3. *The pharisee at his devotions in the temple.* To this place he often repaired. Here he was often seen. His prayers here were constantly presented.

4. *The nature of his worship is described.* You will observe several objectionable, yea odious features in it.

(1.) He abruptly addresses God. "God I thank thee!" It sounds more like the language of one to his equal, than of a creature to his Maker.

(2.) He gives himself credit for a decided superiority over others. I am not as other men, "extortioners, unjust," &c. v. 11. Here is the essence of self-righteousness and self-approbation. Here he vaunts and exalts himself before the Lord. Here he celebrates his superior excellency, and publishes his good deeds. Hence he considers, comparing himself with his fellow-men, to be acceptable worship before God. He also enumerates his religious excellencies. His fastings and his giving tithes of all that he possessed. It is probable that like most of the pharisees, all this was merely external. That in heart and soul he was rapacious and unjust,— "devouring widows' houses," omitting the weightier matters of the law, "judgment, mercy, and faith." See Matt. xxiii. 13, 28.

(3.) He invidiously compares himself with his fellow-worshipper, "Or even as this publican." Surely spiritual arrogance and pride could not go beyond this. He dares before the Searcher of hearts to extol himself, and urge his

claims upon heaven, by directly depreciating a fellow-creature in the act of worship with himself.

(4.) He pretendedly thanks God for his moral excellencies. "God I thank thee," was in his mouth, but self-gratulation were evidently the emotions of his heart. What hypocrisy and deceit! What infatuated self-delusion! Such is the portrait drawn of the pharisee. Observe,

II. THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF THE PUBLICAN. He exhibits,

1. *A deep sense of his unworthiness.* "Standing afar off." He felt the sanctity of the place. He was filled with a sense of awe when he contemplated the Being before whom he was approaching. Of the two worshippers a poet has said,

"One nearer to God's altar trod,
The other to the altar's God."

"He lifts not up so much as his eyes towards heaven," v. 13. He is abased in spirit, and prostrate in soul before God. Notice,

2. *The evident compunction of his soul.* "But smote upon his breast." His guilt was his burden,—his shame his grief. He felt the evil of his nature,—the vileness of his heart. He was overwhelmed with his baseness. His spirit was ready to sink within him, and his feelings were those of indignation against himself, and loathing of his iniquities.

3. *He confessed his state before God and sought mercy.* A sinner he acknowledges himself, and he earnestly supplicates Jehovah's mercy. "God be merciful to me a sinner," v. 13. How concise, how direct, how appropriate. How earnest and intense this one request. Yet how comprehensive and all-sufficient. For the divine mercy could pardon and absolve him. Divine mercy could purify and restore him. Divine mercy could heal and comfort him. Divine

mercy could fully and eternally save him. He needed this, and this was all his need. Notice,

III. THE DIVINE TREATMENT OF BOTH. With both God was fully conversant. He saw through the thin guise of the pharisee, and despised his mockery and parade. He beheld the afflicted, contrite heart of the publican, and looked on him with complacency and delight. He retired "justified." Accepted and approved of God. The mercy he sought, God imparted freely, richly. He retired rejoicing in the compassion of a merciful prayer-hearing God. He sought not the Lord in vain. The pharisee's self-worship,—for prayer it was not,—was rejected. He lived only in the region of self-complacency, and God despised his character, and rejected his service. "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased," &c. v. 14.

Learn,

1. *Man's true state and character.* "A sinner."
2. *His manifest need of mercy.* Sin must be pardoned or punished.
3. *The true way of obtaining mercy.* Believing, contrite prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. *The hateful, ruinous nature of self-righteousness.*

No. XXX.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

“And Jesus answering said, A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead: And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side,” &c.—*Luke* x. 30—37.

THIS parable was delivered on the occasion of a certain lawyer, standing up with a view to perplex the Saviour. Under a feigned purpose, he asked a very important question—What he should “do to inherit eternal life?” v. 25. Jesus knowing all that was in his heart, and resolving to convict him out of his own mouth; and at the same time to shew him the fallaciousness of pharasaic reasoning, replies, that he must do what is written in the law, v. 26. The lawyer then repeats the two great commandments, v. 27. To which Christ answered, “This do, and thou shalt live,” ver. 28. But anxious to justify himself, he raises the question, as to who should be understood by his neighbour. This question forms the basis of the inimitable parable, then delivered. And Jesus answering said, “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho,” &c. Observe in the parable,

I. THE DISTRESSED CONDITION OF A FELLOW CREATURE. A traveller is on his way from the metropolis of Judea to Jericho, and is surprised and seized by a band of robbers. The distance though only about sixteen miles, was through an exposed and dangerous country. Some parts of the road were rocky and mountainous, and not inhabited; affording places of retreat for robbers and highwaymen.

Our traveller alone, and unprotected, becomes an easy prey to them. They not only take his property, but they strip him of his clothes, and wound him, leaving him only just alive. Prostrate on the ground, with his wounds open, and probably the gore flowing therefrom, he is helpless, and ready to perish.

What a spectacle of distress and misery ! What a proof of the cruelty and ferocity of the depraved heart of man ! Of what vileness men are capable,—in some respects more to be dreaded than the savage beast of prey that roams abroad in the forest.

In this state of suffering and peril the wretched man lays, when we are called to witness,

II. THE EMBODYMENT OF SELFISHNESS IN TWO TRAVELLERS WHO ARE PASSING BY.

1. *A certain priest.* Of these a great many resided at Jericho, and therefore would often have occasion to pass to Jerusalem. As he drew near, he beheld the wounded man on the other side of the way, and without doing more than gazing on his mangled fellow being, he hastens on his journey. He neither stops, nor speaks to him ; but leaves him in his misery and helplessness, without compassion, or aid. Next came,

2. *A Levite.* Another of the sacred profession, whose office was to assist the priests in the public services of religion. He, when he came near, just looked on him—saw more fully his condition than the priest had done ; but this was all, for he then held on his journey, and administered no help to the almost dying sufferer. How vile and hard hearted were these two men ! How they degraded their own humanity, and especially sinned against the offices which they held. As men they were base enough, but as religionists they were execrable. Under what a spirit of self-delusion, and vain hypocrisy they were living. At this juncture

when both Priest and Levite had left the man to perish, we are directed,

III. TO SEE AN EXHIBITION OF LOVE AND MERCY WHERE WE SHOULD NOT HAVE EXPECTED TO FIND IT. "But a certain Samaritan as he journeyed," &c. ver. 33.

The sufferer was a Jew; and between the Jews and the Samaritans a deadly prejudice and hostility existed. Besides, they were reckoned a selfish and unfeeling people. He therefore, might have passed on with the utmost indifference, without exciting our surprise. But mark, how contrarywise he acted,

1. *His eye affected his heart.* "When he saw him, he had compassion," v. 33. He recognized a fellow creature in distress and suffering, and his soul was melted, and his sympathies aroused.

2. *His feet hastened to him.* He stayed not to gaze at a distance, nor hurried past the scene, but under the genial influence of mercy, he ran to the spot where the sufferer lay.

3. *His hands ministered to him.* "He bound up his wounds," and thus stayed the effusion of blood. He poured in, oil and wine to allay the pain, and to heal them. "He set him on his own beast," as he was unable to walk. He watched over him with the utmost care. Travelled gently as the sufferer could bear. He conveyed him to the nearest tavern—commended him especially to the host. He gave him twopence, or about one shilling and threepence of our money, to pay the charge; and he engaged to pay any other expense that might be incurred in ministering to his future wants. Here was genuine kindness, tender compassion, in which all that is lovely and beautiful were combined. We see that from its rise to its termination, it was sincere, and ardent, and self-denying. And it was to an unknown individual, and one of a nation which he abhorred. But self and prejudice were both sacrificed on the altar of humanity, goodness, and mercy. Observe,

IV. THE INEVITABLE CONCLUSION TO WHICH THE QUERELOUS LAWYER WAS FORCED. Now says the Great Teacher "Which of these three, was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves?" v. 30. He replied, "He that shewed mercy on him," v. 37. Then said Christ to the lawyer, "Go and do thou likewise," v. 37.

(1.) Think of the Samaritan, and admire his spirit.

(2.) Have equally generous feelings towards all thy suffering fellow creatures.

(3.) Imitate him when such circumstances shall be presented before thine eyes. And the parable says the same to us. The love of our neighbour, which is one of the great essentials of true religion, involves all that the Samaritan felt and did. Nothing less than this is love. And this beautiful as it was, was nothing more. Never ask with a view of evading duty, who is my neighbour? For remember,

"Thy neighbour ! it is he whom thou
Hast power to aid and bless;
Whose aching heart, or burning brow,
Thy soothing hand may press.

Where'er thou meet'st a human form,
Less favored than thine own;
Remember, 'tis thy neighbour worm,
Thy brother, or thy son."

Learn,

1. *The fallacy of that religion which is devoid of mercy and compassion.*

2. *See under what an awful delusion professors of religion may live. As in the case of the priest and Levite.*

3. *Cherish the spirit, and imitate the conduct of the Lord Jesus—"Who went about doing good."*

No. XXXI.

THE MERCIFUL CREDITOR.

“And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor who had two debtors : the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty,” &c.—*Luke* vii. 40, 42.

THE supercilious condition of the pharisees was ever abhorrent to the spirit and feelings of the Lord Jesus. Yet he had to contend with it everywhere. Because he preached to the outcasts and perishing, he was stigmatized as the friend of publicans and sinners. And on the present occasion, because he permitted a penitential heart-broken woman to remain in his presence, and to wash his feet with her contrite tears, his very Messiahship was doubted. For Simon, the pharisee, whose guest he was, concluded, that if he had been a prophet, he would have known the character of the woman, v. 39, and of course knowing it, would have repulsed her. The Saviour with his characteristic wisdom, met these odious prejudices by desiring the attention of his host to the parable under consideration, and draws from him the inference by which his own merciful conduct is fully vindicated. We remark,

I. THAT ALL MEN ARE DEBTORS TO GOD.

(1.) From him all men have received innumerable blessings in trust. That whatever God confers, he confers to be occupied to his glory. That men are not the proprietors of the mercies they enjoy. At best only stewards. Among these mercies are Life,—Health,—Time,—Daily Food,—Reason. Our privileges through the redemption which is in Christ. The Gospel. Our Sabbaths, &c. All have been given for our well-being and improvement.

(2.) A due return for their mercies none have rendered. The return has generally been neglect and ingratitude. Disregard to God's claims. Disobedience. Perversion of our blessings, and an abuse of our mercies. Who has been faithful to the claims of God? Who is not a debtor to Him?

II. THAT MEN ARE DEBTORS TO GOD IN DIFFERENT DEGREES.

1. *There is a difference as to the blessings entrusted.* One has had two talents,—another five,—a third, ten. One much wealth, another little. One many gifts, another few. One has been the child of prosperity,—another has been born for adversity. One has had his lot in the very midst of signal privileges,—another has had few opportunities of improvement.

2. *There is a difference in the degree of moral guilt contracted.* One has been externally proper in his conduct. Like the young ruler who came to Christ. Another has been dissipated and abandoned. In the text one owed fifty pence, the other five hundred. Here was Simon and the woman who was a sinner.

III. THAT SINNERS OF ALL DEGREES ARE INCOMPETENT TO PAY WHAT GOD FULLY DEMANDS. "And when they had nothing." Now the best as well as the worst have nothing to pay. The most exemplary man is a sinner, and is justly condemned before God. The vilest of mankind are sinners too, but in a greater degree. Neither the one nor the other,

(1.) Can atone for their past sins.

(2.) Nor yield perfect obedience irrespective of divine grace for the future.

(3.) Nor avert the just consequences of their misdoings. The whole race are insolvent before God. No real merit to present. No inherent rights to plead. No ability to offer.

Nothing to pay is the state of one and of all men by nature before God.

IV. THAT THE ONLY HOPE OF MORAL DEBTORS IS IN THE MERCY OF GOD. "When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." Observe,

1. *God has revealed himself as the God of mercy.* He has passed by and proclaimed his name, &c. He is rich in mercy. Delighteth in mercy. He will surely have mercy on such as seek him.

2. *God has exhibited his mercy in Christ Jesus.* In the Saviour it was embodied, lived, and it offered him up as the sacrifice for man's redemption and eternal life. Christ was the mercy promised to the fathers.

3. *This mercy is published and offered in the gospel.* "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins," &c. The gospel is full of the invitations and promises of mercy to each and every sinner.

4. *By faith in the Lord Jesus this mercy is realized.* He that believeth is justified freely, &c. Fully pardoned. Enjoys the entire remission of his sin. Is accepted of God, and adopted into the divine family. Be it remembered this forgiveness is "frank," gracious in principle, and in the spirit in which it is imparted.

V. THAT THE SINNER WHO IS MOST FORGIVEN WILL LOVE THE SAVIOUR MOST. This we may reasonably conclude to be the rule, and facts bear out the conclusion. See Simon and the woman who had been a sinner, v. 44. See the history of Saul of Tarsus, who felt because he had been a persecutor, &c., he was the chief of sinners. See the case of Bunyan, the converted blasphemer. And John Newton, the sceptical profligate, and many others.

APPLICATION.

1. *Have you been sensible of your guilt before God?*
2. *Have you felt your own insolvency,—that you nothing to pay with?*
3. *Have you had recourse to the free grace of God in Christ Jesus?*
4. *Have you evinced your gratitude and great love to Christ for his saving mercy?*
5. *The obstinate debtor will be finally and justly punished.*

The poet has beautifully described this penitent woman :

“Drop, drop slow tears !
And bathe those beauteous feet,
Which brought from heaven,
The news and prince of peace.
Cease not wet eyes,
For mercy to entreat :
To cry for vengeance,
Sin doth never cease.
In your deep floods,
Drown all my faults and fears :
Nor let his eye
See sin, but through my tears.”

No. XXXII.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

“I am the good shepherd : the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth : and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep,” &c.—*John* x. 11,—18.

OF the various titles which are applied to the Lord Jesus, none are more general or expressive than that of the Shepherd. As such the Hebrew prophets spoke of Christ. Isaiah says of the Messiah, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd,” &c., c. xl. 11. The Saviour often also adverted to his own work as that of a shepherd. He evidently depicted his own character and mission in the Good Shepherd, who pursued the wanderer and left the ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness. And a great portion of this rich and instructive chapter is thus occupied. The apostle Paul speaks of him as that “Great Shepherd,” Heb. xiii. 20. Peter as “the shepherd and bishop of our souls,” 1 Pet. ii. 5, and also as the “Chief Shepherd,” who shall bestow the crown of glory upon all his faithful servants in the great day of his glorious appearing, c. v. 4. At present let us take a survey of the parabolical discourse in which Jesus pursues this subject so fully. Let us contemplate,

I. CHRIST JESUS AS THE SHEPHERD. The office is so well known as not to require definition or description. Christ is the Shepherd of souls,

1. *By the Father's appointment.* The Father is represented as knowing him as the Shepherd, in distinction from

those who were merely hirelings. His mediatorial authority and offices were given to Him of the Father. Hence He is styled by Jehovah, "My shepherd, the man that is my fellow," Zech. xiii. 7. He ever laid great stress on his being sent of the Father, and receiving his mission and power from him.

2. *By His own voluntary choice* He was ready both to hear and to conform to the Father's will. He was ready to come, as the Father was to send him. Hence both forms of speech are constantly used by the sacred writers, and both with equal truth and propriety. He was so rich in grace, that he freely came to seek and to save that which was lost.

II. CONSIDER THE FLOCK OF CHRIST. And here we must consider them,

1. *As redeemed.* He came to redeem. And in his precious blood we have redemption even the forgiveness of sin. They had wandered, were perishing and self-destroyed. They required to be ransomed out of the hand of the enemy, and to be brought back to God from whom they had departed. Christ, by his incarnation,—life,—obedience, and death, effected this great, this wondrous work. Hence they are described as purchased with the blood of the Son of God. Redeemed not with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. *As restored.* Not only must the sheep be redeemed, but restored. Hence the address of the Good Shepherd is, "Return unto me, for I have redeemed you." And in order to their restoration, he pursues the wanderer, and announces to him the tidings of reconciliation. He sends his servants to find out, and bring the wanderers back. By the gracious influences of the truth and love of the gospel, he allures them, and draws them to himself.

3. *As united to Him.* Brought near to Him. Reconciled. No longer aliens or outcasts, but citizens and friends. In the day of conversion, the soul is graciously united to

Christ. Then they are his, and he is theirs. They are the sheep of his pasture, and as their Shepherd he rejoices over them to do them good.

4. *As recognized by Him.* "And know my sheep," v. 14. The Lord Jesus knoweth all things, he therefore knoweth them that are his. And as such they are distinguished from others. They bear the mark of their Divine owner. They differ from others by the operation of the good spirit within them. He knows every one of His. They are described,

5. *As also knowing Christ.* "And am known of mine," v. 14. None belong to Him who do not know Christ, who do not know him in his titles, and offices, and grace. They have all tasted and known that the Lord is gracious. This knowledge, in both cases, signifies also approbation. Christ approves of his sheep, and is the Saviour of their choice and delight.

6. *They distinguish the voice of Christ.* "They shall hear my voice," v. 16, 17. The voice of Christ is presented to us in his word. Here he speaks to us, and his words are spirit and life. He speaks to us too, by his Holy Spirit, the voice of God within us. Now the carnal and careless disregard the Son of God, and despise his word. But the Saviour's disciples, like Mary, sit at his feet, and hear all his gracious words. Whether he speaks in words of authority, or of direction, or comfort, they hear his voice. And they delight to hear it. It is the joy and life of their souls.

7. *They obey the commands of Christ.* This is also evidently implied in the words, hearing his voice. They so hear as to know and understand his will. So as to love his commands. So as heartily and cheerfully to obey him. "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments," &c.

8. *They imitate His example.* "And they follow me." The eastern shepherd leads, not drives, his flock to the

pastures and streams. He goes before, and with pleasing docility they follow after. Jesus has marked the path of holiness by his own blessed and perfect example. In all things he was the great pattern. In self-government, self-denial, and lowliness, and humility. In kindness, goodness, mercy, and pity. In long-suffering and gentleness. In purity of speech and manners. In holiness of heart and conversation. In the devotion of his spirit and communion with God. In one word, in all things, "He hath left us an example that we should follow his steps." Such, then, are the leading characteristics of the sheep of Christ.

APPLICATION.

1. *How interesting and delightful the character of Christ as a shepherd.* How wise, and good, and gentle,—how gracious and kind.
2. *How lovely and beautiful the character of His flock.* A redeemed company of immortal spirits. Called. Justified. Sanctified.
3. *How important the question,—Are we His sheep?* Have we the signs of His people on us? His love within us?

No. XXXIII.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

(2ND SKETCH.)

“ Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber: But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep, &c.”—*John* x. 1—18.

WE have previously contemplated Christ Jesus as a shepherd, and noticed His flock, with the distinguishing signs by which they are recognized. Let us now proceed to consider,

III. THE SAVIOUR'S FOLD. Now the sheepfold is brought before us in the Saviour's address, ver. 1. We remark,

1. *The Saviour's fold is the church.* Here they are collected and united together. All the saints belong to this one fold. For there is only one fold, and one shepherd. However diversified in opinion—in modes of worship, or sectarian designation; they are but one body, of which Christ is the Head,—one fold, of which Christ is the Shepherd.

2. *Of the fold, Christ is the only entrance.* He is the only way into the sheepfold, see ver. 1, &c. Hence he says, “ I am the door of the sheep,” ver. 8, 9. There is no saving acceptance to God, but by the Saviour. No man cometh to the Father, except by Him. Christ is the centre of union to all his people. They are all one in Christ Jesus. Faith in him, and a profession of him before men, are the essential qualifications to membership with his church. Any other mode of admission is climbing over, and is the entrance of the thief and robber.

As we are all the children of God by faith, so being his children we belong to the one fold of the Redeemer. We proceed to notice,

IV. THE SAVIOUR'S PASTURES. The Psalmist sang, "He leadeth me into green pastures." The shepherd not only has his fold for security, but his pastures for the nourishment of his sheep.

1. *There is the word.* Here is rich and ample provision for his people. By it they are nourished and strengthened. It is the living and abiding word. Here there are resources of instruction, peace and security. They are to desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. There are,

2. *The ordinances of the gospel.* Preaching of the gospel. Social prayer. The Lord's Supper, &c. In all these there is abundant nourishment for the soul. Here God prepares his feast of fat things. Here the provision of mercy is laid on the family board. Here there is enough and to spare,

3. *Secret prayer and meditation.* By these the soul comes into immediate and gracious connection with God. Here they have food to eat of which the world knows nothing. These are the delectable mountains. The verdant hills ever fresh and green. The fertile valleys yielding the richest pasturage for the soul.

V. SOME OF THE PECULIAR AND DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRIST AS THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

A careful, attentive, and faithful shepherd, under ordinary circumstances would be entitled a good shepherd. But Christ is pre-eminently so,

1. *On account of his unbounded love to the flock.* This love was exhibited in that great act by which their redemption was accomplished, in laying down his life for the sheep. "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep," ver. 11. He not only entertained purposes of mercy and grace—not only left heaven and came to

earth to collect the scattered wanderers. Not only lived a life of sorrow, grief and humiliation ; but he gave up his sacred life. His soul sorrowed even unto death, in Gethsemane. He was arraigned, buffeted, tried, condemned, and put to death, even the ignominious death of the cross. Herein was love, such as had never before been exhibited.

“See from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down !
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown.”

Hence every disciple can say, “He loved me and gave himself for me.” We refer,

2. *To His especial care of His flock.* He takes especial interest in their preservation. They are in his hand. He is able to keep them. Hence he adds, “Neither shall any pluck them out of my hand,” ver. 28. No enemy can destroy them. Their defence is invincible—their security inviolable, for he avers, “They shall never perish.” Individuals, nations, and vast empires have perished—have been blotted out ; but his sheep shall never perish. The wisdom, love and power of the omnipotent Redeemer, are all guaranteed for their preservation. Kept by the power of God through faith to salvation. We allude,

3 *To their future and final destination.* “I give unto them eternal life.” They are collected, folded, preserved here, and glorified hereafter. Hence the purpose of Christ respecting them is presented in his sacerdotal prayer, “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory,” John xvii. 24. Now this is the final destiny of the Saviour's sheep. They are called to his eternal kingdom and glory. Think of the love which purposed such a state of exaltation and blessedness. That has prepared such glorious things for those who love him. Let us just glance,

VI. AT THE FOLD OF CHRIST, WHEN PERFECTED IN THE HEAVENLY STATE. He has had his sheep and fold in every age of the world. He had them in the days of his sojourning on earth. But he said, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; these also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd," ver. 16. Here doubtless he referred to the Gentiles, who should be called to be partakers of his grace, and who should be one in Him with the Jews. But there is yet the grand consummation, when all his sheep shall be collected.

(1.) Gathered from all generations.

(2.) Gathered from all nations, and people, and tongues.

(3.) Gathered to the upper and better fold in heaven.

(4.) Gathered to enjoy the celestial pastures. "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Rev. vii. 17.

APPLICATION.

1. *How transcendently excellent and holy the character of our good shepherd.*

2. *How safe and happy, and blessed his flock.*

3. *How the hope of future perfected bliss, should inspire with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.*

4. *How futile the malevolent attacks of satanic agents and wicked men.*

5. *How glorious will be the completed fold of the Saviour in heaven.*

SKETCHES
ON THE
MIRACLES OF CHRIST.

No. I.

THE MIRACULOUS POWER OF CHRIST.

“Ye men of Israel, hear these words : Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.”—*Acts* ii. 22.

GOD has been pleased in all dispensations to testify to the authenticity of his truth and the validity of his servants, whom he hath sent forth to instruct mankind. Thus Moses was empowered to exhibit the glory of Jehovah and the reality of his own divine commission, by extraordinary deeds and signs which he wrought. Thus Elijah and Elisha, and others of the prophets, gave unequivocal evidence, that God was with them and spake by them. We look for the same evidences of the Messiahship of Christ, and the Gospels abound with the narrations of them. By them it was manifest to all unprejudiced minds, that he was indeed the Christ the Son of God. Hence he says of the unbelieving Jews, “If I had not done among them, works which none other man did, they had not had sin, but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father,” *John* xv. 24. Christ, therefore desired that his character and office should be tested by the works which he performed, and surely no more obvious and certain ordeal could have been proposed. As

the miracles of the Saviour were connected with the whole course of his blessed ministry, we anticipate great instruction and profit, in giving them our serious and prayerful consideration. Observe,

I. THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF THE SAVIOUR.

II. A DECLARATION OF THE MIRACULOUS WORKS DONE BY HIM. Notice then,

I. THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF THE SAVIOUR. He is presented to us,

1. *In His human nature.* "A man," &c. The earliest prediction referred to Him as the "seed of the woman." He was promised as a "child born," as a "son given." His lineage and birthplace were foretold. At length in the fulness of the times he came, "made of a woman," the fruit of the virgin's womb. Essentially in body, soul, and spirit, a man. Yet with this extraordinary difference, that the holy thing born of the virgin, was conceived by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost. He often described himself as a man, and the Son of man. But with the manhood of the Redeemer was essentially and mysteriously allied the Godhead. He was the tabernacle of the fulness of the God. "God was in Christ." He was "God with us." "The brightness of the Father's glory, and express image of his person." "God manifest in the flesh." "God over all, blessed for evermore." But Peter, on this occasion was anxious to prove, that Jesus was the Christ or anointed of God. He is presented to us next,

2. *In His name, &c.* "Jesus of Nazareth." His name, Jesus, was given to him on account of his being the long promised Saviour. "Because he shall save his people," &c. Nazareth was where he chiefly dwelt until he entered on his ministry. Here he was brought up. The place of his residence. Hence he was called a Nazarene. Here too he began to open to men the kingdom of heaven. See Luke iv. 16, &c. How precious the name of "Jesus."

beautifully said,

“How sweet the name of Jesus sounds,
In a believer’s ear,
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.”

We are referred,

3. *To the Divine approval of Christ.* “Approved of God.” There were many evidences that God approved of him. The striking circumstances of his baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended, and the voice was heard, “This is my beloved Son,” &c. The repetition of the same testimony on the mount of transfiguration. But such also were all the miracles he wrought. All these were the evidences which God gave to his Messiahship. They were all confirmatory of the divine approbation. God never gave these signs to establish an impostor or false prophet, or to give efficacy to a delusion or lie. Thus Jesus was approved of God by miracles and wonders, and signs. By the series of wonders which attended his life and ministry. Observe, we have in the text,

II. A DECLARATION OF THE MIRACULOUS WORKS DONE BY HIM. Now these miracles of Christ,

1. *Were numerous.* We cannot state exactly how many, for often they are given to us in general phraseology. As ‘he healed multitudes,’ ‘cast devils out of many,’ &c. It is clear that he wrought more miracles than all those recorded of Moses and the prophets. His ministry was one glorious scene of signs and miracles, and wondrous works.

2. *They were strikingly various.* All sorts of diseases and maladies he healed. All kinds of infirmities removed. Evil spirits of all sorts dispossessed. He wrought miracles on all classes and descriptions of persons. His wonders were performed on the sea and on the land, and on the living and on the dead. Those recently afflicted, as Peter’s wife’s mother, and those who had been bowed with afflictions for many years.

3. *They were performed in the most public places.* Never in secret. There were always some to attest them. Often many persons, and sometimes crowds. Some of his miracles were wrought in the presence of his bitterest enemies. His signs were wrought in the light of day, in "the midst" of the Jews, as they themselves knew.

4. *They were wrought by his own inherent divine power, and in his own name.* Moses and the prophets professedly wrought their miracles by a power given at the time, and in the name of the Jehovah of Israel. But Christ exercised supreme authority, and spake, and by his own power wrought the deeds, and wonders, and signs. He said, "I will, be thou whole." He commanded Lazarus to "come forth." He spoke, and rebuked the winds and the sea, &c. And it is evident that this power he could command on any emergency, and thus was illustrated, "The Father loved the Son, and hath given all things into his hands." And again, when he declared, "All power is given unto me, both in heaven on earth."

5. *His miracles were in harmony with the kingdom of grace and mercy he came to set up.* His, were emphatically miracles of love and mercy. He healed, but never inflicted diseases. He blessed, but cursed not. He imparted ease, and comfort, and joy, but never did minister to increase the miseries of men. He came not to blight or to destroy, but to save. "He went about doing good."

6. *His miracles were often connected with spiritual blessings.* Often when he healed the body, he also forgave the sin, and healed the maladies of the mind. Often when he expelled demons, he also made the objects of his miraculous mercy, the subjects of his saving grace. Learn,

1. *How glorious is the character of the Saviour.*

2. *How worthy of our admiration, confidence, and supreme affection.*

3. *How terrible will be his wrath to impenitent sinners.*

No. II.

THE MIRACLE AT THE MARRIAGE OF CANA.

“And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage,” &c.—*John* ii. 1—11.

MARRIAGE is an institution of God, and which originated in the Divine desire for the perpetual social happiness of man. In various ages of the world false ascetic principles have been promulgated, and the purity of celibacy proclaimed. This sentiment had no countenance either from the teaching or conduct of the Saviour. His first miracle at Cana, in Galilee, was a distinguished seal of honour on the marriage relationship, and replete with evidences of his Messiahship and glory. It is probable that the nuptial parties might be related to the mother of Jesus, as we find her, in connection with Him, a guest on the occasion. Marriage ceremonies in the East, are conducted with considerable pomp, and connected with feasting and rejoicing. It would appear that on this occasion a considerable number of persons graced the nuptial banquet, and in this joyous company, Jesus and his mother were found. Observe,

I. THE LACK OF WINE INTIMATED. “And when they wanted wine,” &c. v. 3. It is probable that this lack of wine originated either in the humble circumstances of the family, or in the more numerous attendance of guests than had been anticipated. At any rate, the wine was exhausted. The mother of Jesus therefore addressed him, and intimated the state in which they were involved. Is it not evident from

this, that she knew the power he possessed, and that she expected the putting forth of that power on the present occasion? To this, Jesus replied, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come," v. 4. Our translation of this answer appears harsh, and bordering on disrespect. But it is evident that the gracious Jesus, in his reply to his mother, merely intended to check her eager anxiety. To urge her to wait for results, and the reason he assigned was surely sufficient: "Mine hour is not yet come." His mother therefore directed the servants to obey his intimations and to watch for them, v. 5. Observe,

II. THE SAVIOUR'S COMMANDS. Jesus said unto them, "Fill the water-pots with water." These were stone water-pots, capable of holding about two or three firkins, or seven or eight gallons. They were to be filled with water. Hence Christ acted on this occasion as he did when he fed the five thousand. He made a few loaves and fishes the material of his productive energy. So now water is the basis of the miracle he works.

(1.) In this, however, the miracle became more obvious. The servants knew the wine was all done, and that it was truly water which had been poured into these pots.

(2.) Being filled to the brim with water, it would be plain that there was no room for pouring in wine, and thus making a mixture of the two.

(3.) The same servants drew it forth who poured in the water, so that collusion or imposition was impossible. Observe,

III. THE DIRECTION TO DRAW IT FORTH. At Christ's command it was borne unto the governor of the feast. The governor was unacquainted with the process which had been going on. He knew not either how or whence it was, v. 9.

(1.) He attests his surprize at the quality of the wine. He declares it to be emphatically, "good wine," the best they had partaken of.

(2.) He expresses his astonishment that this should have

been furnished last. Here was a reverse of the ordinary rule—that the richest wine was to be first brought forth, and then afterwards the less fine and luscious, verse 10.—Notice,

IV. THE RESULTS ARISING FROM THE MIRACLE THUS WROUGHT.

1. *It manifested forth the Saviour's glory.* It was an express evidence of his power and Godhead. It exhibited the glory of his creative energy. The same power that acted on the original chaos, and brought forth light, and beauty, and order, was now put forth on the water, and converted it into delicious wine.

2. *It produced faith in his Divine mission.* Many of "his disciples believed on him," v. 11. They beheld in him the prophet like unto Moses, &c. They beheld in him the sent of the Father, the Son of the most high God. And they exercised unwavering faith in him. Now what are the lessons we learn from this miracle,

(1.) That the presence of Christ can alone sanctify our festive occasions. That is a questionable assembly in which Jesus cannot be invited, and heartily welcomed as a guest. Every marriage feast should especially be graced by his Divine and condescending presence.

(2.) That in all exigencies our applications may be confidently made to the Saviour. He can do all for us, and be all to us.

(3.) That the blessings which come with his gracious seal upon them, are manifestly best and most precious.

(4.) We must be careful not to turn the grace of God into an argument for wantonness or dissipation. For we have no right to conclude that either the guests on this occasion were partially inebriated, or that he produced a strong intoxicating wine which would have imperilled their principles of sobriety. His wine was "the best," and surely by this is meant "the richest,"—containing most of the flavour of the grape, and

not a highly stimulating fluid, equally opposed to the welfare of the body, as to the happiness and safety of the soul.

(5.) In all things let us seek to exercise faith in the Redeemer, and to do all things to his glory.

No. III.

MIRACLES PERFORMED IN GALILEE.

“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people: And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those who were possessed with devils, and those who were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.”—*Matt.* iv. 23, 24.

THE blessed Jesus went about doing good. Thus he began the work of his ministry. Thus he continued, until he could say, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” It was necessary that he should establish his claim to the Messiahship, by the signs and wondrous works which he should perform. With miraculous performances he therefore began the publication of the great truths of his kingdom. The idea given of Christ in this striking passage, is that of great diligence. He “went about all Galilee.” Itinerating through the whole district—not waiting for the multitudes to come to Him, he went forth to seek them, that they might become acquainted with the glad tidings of salvation, and become the subjects of his gracious kingdom. Observe then,

I. THE SAVIOUR’S MINISTRY.

II. THE CONFIRMATION OF THAT MINISTRY.

III. THE RESULTS WHICH ACCOMPANIED IT. Observe,

I. THE SAVIOUR’S MINISTRY.

1. *It was personal.* He preached and taught. Not by his servants and ambassadors only, but in his own person. Hence it has been quaintly remarked, ‘that God had only one son, and he made a preacher of him.’ It was distinctly predicted that he should be a teacher, and proclaim the good news. As the great anti-type of Moses, the people were to hearken to Him. “Grace,” says the Psalmist—speaking predictively—“is poured into thy lips,” *Psa. xlv. 2, &c.*

2. *It was gracious.* He “preached the gospel of the kingdom.” The good news of that spiritual kingdom of love and mercy, which he came to set up in the world. A kingdom of mercy and grace to be established on earth, for the salvation of guilty, perishing sinners. The reign of infinite compassion and pity among a rebellious race of transgressors. A kingdom in which the sceptre was one of mercy, and one which every traitor was invited to come and touch, and live. No news ever reached the ear of man so joyous and blessed, as that of the gospel of the kingdom: “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”

3. *His ministry was instructive.* “Teaching in their synagogues.” In the places erected for Jewish worship. Here he went, and met with the pious companies who repaired thither, and instructed them in the doctrines of the new dispensation. Opened to their understandings the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

4. *His ministry was arduous and aggressive.* “He went about all Galilee.” It was his one great concern—his meat and his drink. He laboured incessantly—diligently. He worked while it was day. He never faltered—nor wearied—nor turned aside. And he pushed his doctrines even into the synagogues. He knew that Judaism must be superseded, and therefore he urged the great truths of his kingdom, and endeavoured to overturn by his powerful declarations and

arguments, all impeding principles and systems. Yet he did this in the spirit of meekness and love.

II. THE CONFIRMATION OF HIS MINISTRY. "Healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of diseases," &c.

1. *He supernaturally removed diseases.* Not by any system of medicine; but by his word—by the power of his omnific voice. He spake sickness and disease away from those who were afflicted. At his bidding, pain and disorders fled—and health and vigor were bestowed. Thus too does he remove the disease of the soul, and imparts spiritual health to all who come to Him.

2. *He expelled devils.* Those who were under the direct power of the devil. In whom evil spirits dwelt bodily. These were cast out by his word. Devils trembled and fled before Him.

The human heart in its carnal state is under the power of Satan, and none but Christ can expel the strong one from the soul. He does this in every case where he exerts his converting power. All such are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of satan, to God. He came that he might destroy the works of the devil.

3. *He restored the insane.* Those afflicted with lunacy. A kind of insanity which was supposed to be greatly influenced by the changes of the moon. These were restored to soundness of mind, and the enjoyment of perfect reason. All sin is madness. Men only come to themselves when they repent and believe the gospel, and are made the subjects of the Saviour's renewing grace. And,

4. *He recovered those afflicted with paralysis.* The withered limbs had vitality and action conveyed to them. Hence, at his word the lame leaped as the hart, and the paralytic and apoplectic danced for joy. To the wasted paralyzed powers of the soul Christ imparts strength,—and to the feeble and lame, he gives ability to run in the way of his commandments. Observe in reference to Christ's ministry,

III. THE RESULTS WHICH ACCOMPANIED IT. “And his fame went throughout all Syria,” &c.

1. *The power and grace of Jesus were celebrated.* The people beheld and experienced his miraculous power, and they talked of it—extolled it, and spread it far and wide. This ought to be done by all who have experienced his saving power. Every converted soul should spread abroad his mighty and gracious doings. “Come all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what the Lord hath done for my soul.”

2. *Multitudes were brought to Jesus.* This was the result of his gracious fame being spread abroad. And this will be the effect when the people of God are faithful witnesses for Christ. It is the province of the Christian to bring others to Christ. Just as Philip brought Nathaniel, and as the women of Samaria brought her neighbours to see the man who had told her all that ever she had done.

3. *Much sickness and misery was removed.* For it would appear that all were healed who came unto Him. That no case was too desperate for his Divine skill and power. Hence health and joy were spread abroad, and disease and sorrow blotted out. Just so is it when sinners are brought to experience the healing influences of the grace of the gospel. Then the painful maladies of the mind are healed; and then the joys of salvation fill the believing soul. Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound.

Learn from this subject,

1. *The Divine dignity and power of the Lord Jesus.* His miraculous works not only evinced his real Messiahship, but also were bright evidences of his power and Godhead.

2. *The gracious and merciful character of the gospel.*

3. *The necessity of constant faithfulness, and diligence in the Christian ministry.*

And,

4. *That the way to obtain spiritual healing and happiness, is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.*

No. IV.

THE RESTORING OF THE PARALYTIC.

“And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee,” &c.—*Matt.* ix. 1—8.

THE whole of the circumstances connected with this miracle are truly interesting. The history of it is comprehended in a short paragraph, but it is replete with valuable thoughts and instructive ideas. Jesus had just left the coasts of the Gergesenes, who on account of their sordid love of the swine which had perished, had besought that Christ would depart from them. He then entered into a ship and came into his own city, Capernaum, where at that time he resided. No sooner is his arrival known, than the diseased paralytic is brought to him, and the cure wrought recorded in the text. Observe,

I. THE CONDITION OF THE SUFFERER.

II. THE FAITH OF THE PEOPLE.

III. THE CURE WROUGHT BY THE SAVIOUR.

IV. THE PREJUDICE OF THE SCRIBES. And,

V. THE HOMAGE OF THE MULTITUDE. Observe,

I. THE CONDITION OF THE SUFFERER. His disease was the palsy, v. 2. A disease which incapacitated him for labour or enjoyment. A disease rarely if ever cured. In his case it seemed inveterate and confirmed. He was evidently unable to work, confined to his bed, &c. His condition was truly pitiable, deplorable—and, humanly speaking, hopeless. A fit picture of a diseased soul. A soul weakened,—ener-

vated by sin. Yielding no service to God,—incapable of moral action. Without true enjoyment. Beyond the power of human energy to restore. Yet this is the true state of all unregenerate men,—morally diseased and ready to perish. How desirable that men should know and feel it, and earnestly desire the healing of the Saviour's gracious power. Notice,

II. THE FAITH OF THE PEOPLE. Who they were is not stated. Most likely they were the relatives and friends of the afflicted man. Most likely they had heard of the fame of the Saviour. Had informed the sufferer, and hence the determination of all parties, when Christ drew near, to avail themselves of his restoring power. We see their faith evidenced inasmuch as,

1. *They brought him to Jesus.* They had confidence in Christ's power and willingness to heal.

2. *They overcame the difficulties which presented themselves.* Mark (c. ii. 1,) states, that the house where Christ was, was so surrounded with the multitude, that they could not reach the door. They then ascended and reached the roof of the building, and removed the awning which was spread over the centre court of the house, and let the man down into the very presence of Christ. Here their faith worked a holy resolution, and a determinate mode of action exceedingly worthy of imitation.

3. *They exhibited the love and compassion which faith produceth.* Faith works by love, and here was a display of generous compassion for a fellow-sufferer. Here selfish indifference was trampled on, and a generous spirit of tender kindness produced. True faith in the Lord Jesus is ever followed by compassion for perishing sinners around us.

III. THE CURE WROUGHT BY THE SAVIOUR. "And Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy, son, be of good cheer: thy sins be forgiven thee," v. 2. Now mark, Christ,

1. *Removes the malady of the mind.* He pardons the

guilt of the soul. He removes the malady from within. He does this readily, tenderly, distinctly. It is probable that his affliction had been the direct result of transgression. The Saviour therefore reminded him of that, and removes the moral cause of his suffering. It is not unlikely that the man was in a state of remorse and compunction of soul for his iniquities. Therefore Christ takes away the load of guilt from his soul. Afterwards,

2. *He bids him arise.* Now circulation has begun,—strength is felt, and the helpless sufferer is enabled to stand up. He stands up the monument of Christ's healing power and wondrous grace.

3. *He directs him to bear his bed and return to his own dwelling.* Not only can the man stand, but he is able to roll up the mattress on which he had been borne, and to carry it, and return to his house. Here was an unquestionable cure, and the evidence such as no unbelief or prejudice could gainsay. But notice,

IV. THE PREJUDICE OF THE SCRIBES. Certain of the scribes "said within themselves, this man blasphemeth." These were the unuttered thoughts of their hearts. Yet Christ was fully conversant of them. As the Omniscient Lord he knew their thoughts. The miracle Christ had wrought was an evidence of the divinity of his mission, and this they might have reasonably inferred. But no,—disliking the person of the Saviour, offended with his lowly appearance and his spiritual doctrines, they blindly reason in their hearts that Christ is an evil person, and was a blasphemer against God, in promising forgiveness of sin. How deplorable is the mind and heart under the influence of prejudice. How it perverts the judgment, and vitiates the passions, and corrupts the whole man. It was the great sin, and the cause of the final ruin of the Jewish nation. But mark,

V. THE HOMAGE OF THE MULTITUDE. "But when the

multitude saw it they marvelled, they glorified God, &c., ver. 8.

1. *They admitted the miracle.* They saw it, and believed its reality.

2. *They were greatly astonished.* Abundant reason had they for marvelling. Who would not have been filled with wonder and amazement?

3. *They adored God and gave him the glory.* They saw no signs that this was the work of the evil one. They believed it to be what it really was, a display of the great power of God. And in their hearts, and with their voices, they celebrated Jehovah's praise.

Learn,

1. *That sin is the great cause of suffering.* All our pains, and diseases, and death itself, are the result of sin.

2. *Jesus Christ is the one efficient Saviour.*

“He is able,—He is willing,—
Doubt no more.”

3. *It should be our desire to bring men to Christ.* Parents, friends, &c., should all labour to do this. Our faith and prayers may be effective of much good.

4. *God in Christ must be glorified in all things.* Ours is the benefit, but to God in Christ Jesus, all the honour and homage must be paid.

No. V.

CASTING OUT THE DUMB SPIRIT.

“And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, who hath a dumb spirit: And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not,” &c.—*Mark ix. 17—27.*

SATAN seems to have possessed amazing power about the period of Christ’s advent and mission upon earth. Hence not only did he reign in the hearts of the children of disobedience, but he also afflicted persons with grievous diseases, and held bodily possession of numbers of individuals. Our subject describes a peculiarly distressing case of this kind, and exhibits the power and compassion of Christ in the deliverance effected. Let us,

I. CONTEMPLATE THE SUFFERER. The sufferer was a youth, and his afflicted state is thus described,

1. *He was unable to speak.* Hence the spirit possessing him is called a dumb spirit. This was a very serious deprivation. But,

2. *He was liable to violent convulsions.* Hence under the paroxysms of suffering, “he foamed at the mouth,” “gnashed with his teeth,” and furiously tore and mangled his own person.

3. *His flesh and strength were wearing away.* And he “pineth away,” v. 18. We can scarcely conceive of a more distressing spectacle of suffering and misery. How almost hopeless was his condition,—for it is added that he had been thus afflicted from a child, v. 21. But observe,

II. THE PERSON OF THE APPLICANT. This was the father of the sufferer. He said, "I have brought unto thee my son," &c., v. 17. He was evidently excited by deep natural affection and tender compassion for his afflicted child. This example of parental love and solicitude is worthy of our imitation. You will observe in the conduct of the father,

1. *The mistake he originally committed.* He went to the disciples for relief instead of to the Saviour. "And I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out, and they could not," v. 18. How common it is to go to inferior sources for relief. How many go to means, and trust in these instead of the Author of all good,—the God of the means. How commonly we repair to the creature, forgetting the Creator.

2. *He then came to Jesus.* His error is now corrected, and he is in the presence of Him unto whom all power is committed both in heaven and on earth. He now says, "Master, I have brought him unto thee," &c., v. 17. Happy they who come with all their burden and sorrows to Jesus.

"Only Jesus—only Jesus—
Can do helpless sinners good."

3. *He describes the sufferings of his child.* He details the particulars, and also dwells on the imminent peril of the child. For he says, "And oft-times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters to destroy him," v. 22.

4. *He earnestly appeals for relief.* "But if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us," ver. 22. Here he makes the case his own. He identifies his child's sufferings with himself. He evidently had some doubts of Christ's power to meet this extreme case. "If thou canst." But he casts all his deep and anxious care on the Saviour's compassion. "Have compassion and help us." Notice,

III. THE CONDUCT OF THE SAVIOUR. He had already rebuked the disciples for want of faith, v. 19. He had ordered the child to be brought unto him. He had kindly enquired into the particulars of his sufferings, ver. 21. And now having the case fully before him, and having heard the earnest and tender appeal of the father, he rolls it back with all its responsibility on the father's faith. Jesus said, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth," ver. 23. As if he had said,

1. *In me there is an efficiency of power.* But thy faith must elicit its operation—canst thou lay hold of my strength? If so, it can do all thou needest.

2. *In me there is amplitude of efficacy.* Canst thou draw out the virtue and apply it to thy suffering son? There is virtue enough in me to heal the maladies of a wretched world. Extract it by thy faith, and thy son is healed.

3. *In me there is graciousness of disposition.* Canst thou honour my office, and mission, and work? If so, I will have compassion on thee, and restore thy child. I came to seek and to save that which is lost, and if thou canst but believe, all thou seekest and desiredst is fully possible. For all that can be done, faith can do it.

IV. THE HUMBLE PRAYERFUL FAITH OF THE FATHER. He now felt that the whole weight of the responsibility rested on himself. The heavy load oppressed him. His spirit became intensely anxious. He collected all the confidence of his soul. And,

1. *Affirmed his faith.* "Lord I believe." I can trust this case to thee. I do believe in thy power and efficacy, and in thy readiness to save my son.

2. *He admitted the lingerings of his unbelief.* Hence he adverts to his unbelief. There was a great inward conflict distressing his spirit. He felt the difficulties of the case,—the lingering fears interposed as he was endeavouring to cast all on the Saviour's help.

3. *He earnestly sued for the Saviour's aid.* "Help thou mine unbelief." I would fain believe, explicitly, heartily, tully. I feel my soul rising in confidence. I dread lest my wickedness should entail on my child his terrible affliction. I must therefore cast my soul on thy tender sympathy and pity. "Help thou mine unbelief," v. 24. Notice,

V. THE MIRACLE THE SAVIOUR WROUGHT. He charged the dumb and deaf spirit to come out, v. 25. The spirit struggled to retain possession, and "cried and rent him sore." It appeared as if the child would perish in the conflict. "Hence "he was as one dead," v. 26. But Christ overcame, the spirit was expelled, and "Jesus took the child by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose," v. 27. Triumphant Saviour!—Happy child, and delighted parent!—Learn,

1. *The malevolent character of the devil.* It is his work to curse, and to torture, and to destroy.

2. *The gracious saving power of the Redeemer.* He can deliver, and he delights to do so.

3. *The mighty efficacy of faith.* Faith honours Christ, and Christ will honour and meet the cries of believing, persevering supplication.

4. *What a lesson of parental affection and influence.* Learn to bring your children in the exercise of faith to the Saviour.

No. VI.

MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES AND FISHES.

“And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals: But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat,” &c.—*Matt.* xiv. 15—21.

JESUS had been employed during a long day in teaching and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and in doing good to the bodies and souls of men. A multitude of persons had been listening to his discourses, and witnessing the miracles he had wrought. They were now in a desert place, and the shades of evening were surrounding them. The disciples under a feeling of concern for the people, urged the Saviour to dismiss them, that they might return to the villages, and buy themselves victuals, ver. 15. To this the Redeemer replied, “it is not needful for them to depart. Give ye them to eat.” ver. 16. They then explain to Him the small store they possessed: “We have here but five loaves, and two fishes,” ver. 17. A quantity quite inadequate to the wants of so large a multitude.

These then were the circumstances in which they were placed. Christ, however, had a glorious purpose in view. He knew how easily he could meet all their necessities. Observe then,

I. THE LIMITED PROVISION IN THE HANDS OF CHRIST. He said in reference to the five loaves, &c. “bring them hither to me,” ver. 18. In the hands of the disciples, this provision was utterly incapable of feeding thousands of persons. But how altered is the case when as so many,

golden grains of seed,—this provision is in the hands of the Saviour. Those hands that formed the universe—that stretched out the heavens as a curtain. That roll all the planets in their orbits. That guide and rule over all.

Notice,

II. THE ORDER ENFORCED. The multitude were directed to sit down. The other evangelists add—that they sat in companies, fifties and hundreds. Thus there would be no confusion. None would be overlooked. The exact number would be ascertained, and also, the whole miraculous process would be better observed by all. Order is described by one, as heaven's first law. It is evident that the Lord was the author of order and peace, and not of confusion. Wise arrangement and beautiful order characterize all the works of God. Sin threw disorder into the world. Sin produces disorder in the soul. The reign of grace in the heart, is the reign of order.

III. THE DEVOTION &C. EXHIBITED. Order makes way for devotion. We now behold Jesus,

(1.) Looking up to heaven in the spirit of adoration and love to his heavenly Father.

(2.) He blessed the food. He sanctified it for this miraculous occasion, by holy thanksgiving. Acknowledged God as the bountiful giver, &c.

(3.) And brake. Divided the small loaves into lesser portions.

(4.) And then presented it to His disciples that they might bear it to the people. He thus honored his disciples. He thus presented an emblem of their real office and work, to receive from him the bread of eternal life, and to bear it to the perishing multitudes of mankind. Observe,

IV. THE MIRACLE NOW WROUGHT. The disciples bore it to the people. But there would not be a morsel each for them. Here then the Divine power was displayed. In Christ's hands as he brake it, in the disciples' hands as it

was borne to the people; or in the baskets as it was carried from company to company, the provision increased and multiplied—there was no lack. Every one of the five thousand men, and all the women and children ate, and ate heartily, and there was more than enough for all. For of the five small loaves, and two fishes, there were twelve baskets full of fragments, ver. 20, 21. Observe,

V. THE STRIKING FEATURES OF THIS MIRACLE.

(1.) It was public. In the face of thousands.

(2.) It was beyond the power of collusion. For a sufficiency of provision for so many thousands could not have been smuggled into their midst.

(3.) It was most palpable. They saw it. They did more, they ate. It removed the sensation of hunger—they were filled.

(4.) The number of the partakers rendered imposition impossible. Doubtless there were all sorts of persons. If any doubt could have been thrown upon it, it would have been done. But they all ate, and they were all living actual exemplifications of the truth of the miracle which had been wrought. Observe,

VI. THE LESSON OF FRUGALITY WHICH IS ADMINISTERED TO US. According to another evangelist, Jesus said—“Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost.” Those hands that had borne the miraculously increasing provision, were not to be wasteful, and to neglect the broken pieces that fell to the ground. These were all to be collected, and of these twelve baskets full remained. What lessons of prudence and frugality are thus taught to us.

(1.) How many temporal mercies are wasted in extravagance, while hundreds have scarcely food to eat.

(2.) How many waste their means in profligacy, and bring themselves to want.

(3.) How many waste their talents instead of employing them in the service of God.

(4.) How many waste their time and opportunities of getting, and doing good. To each and all of these how important the admonition—"Gather up the fragments," &c.

APPLICATION.

1. In the multitudes hungering for food, we have a striking representation of the famishing state of mankind in reference to spiritual things.

2. In the compassion and power of Christ, we see the hope of the perishing sinner. Unless Christ pity and help, the wandering sinner must perish.

3. In the disciples bearing the food to the people, we see exhibited the nature and design of the Christian ministry. They are to break unto men the bread of life. They are to communicate to souls the blessings of the gospel, which Christ has entrusted to them.

4. In the abundance of the provision, we see the fulness of the gospel.

Here is—

"Enough for each—enough for all,
Enough for evermore."

5. In the the satisfaction of the multitude, we learn that personal partaking of Christ is essential to our happiness.

We must feed upon Christ by faith. "Except a man eat his flesh and drink his blood," &c. Hearing merely will not do. We must by living faith receive the grace of God into the soul. This gives real and permanent satisfaction. There is no lack to those who fear the Lord. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Have you listened to Christ's words? Have you waited on Christ in his ordinances? Have you believed on him to the salvation of your souls?

No. VII.

THE BETHESDA POOL, ETC.

“Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep *market* a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water,” &c.—*John* v. 2—9.

MUCH dispute has arisen from the different views taken by critics and expositors as to the leading features of this interesting paragraph. Some have alleged that the 4th verse is not sufficiently authenticated, and therefore dispute what is stated concerning an angel going down to the pool at certain periods to agitate the waters, and impart supernatural qualities to them. Hence also many have been at considerable pains to explain their sanatory virtues, as being probably connected with some mineral spring. We think it safest and wisest to take the testimony literally, as given by the evangelist. It is obvious that the sentiments conveyed are these. That the waters of the pool of Bethesda were periodically affected, and then, and then only, possessed healing properties, and that this was believed to be effected by the agency of an angel sent from God for this merciful purpose. For the convenience of the sick, five porches had been erected, where they could collect together and be in readiness for the moving of the waters. That pool, with its healing virtues, might typify the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness: with these points of difference—that the Bethesda pool was local, and for the benefit of the inhabitants of Jerusalem chiefly,—the Gospel pool is equally near and accessible to the wide world. The Bethesda pool was only efficacious occasionally, the Gospel pool is open at all times, and is ever resto-

rative to the sin sick soul. The Bethesda pool only healed the first who plunged into it. The Gospel fountain saves all who believingly apply to it. Well, at this pool at the time to which the text refers, we are called to contemplate,

I. AN AFFLICTED FELLOW CREATURE. His affliction is not specified, but it was manifestly,

1. *Great.* The Saviour beheld him as he lay. For he was unable to walk, or even to rise without help. Probably his disease was paralysis or catelepsy.

2. *It was of long standing.* "Thirty and eight years." More than the ordinary length of a human generation. Think of the protracted sufferings he must have borne.

3. *It was accompanied with great human neglect.* He seemed to be friendless. His relatives probably deceased. Himself obviously in the lowest stage of penury, and therefore none caring for his sorrows, and no friendly hand to help him in, at the troubling of the waters. Hence,

4. *He had been the subject of grievous disappointments.* When Jesus interrogated him he said, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me," v. 7. He had often witnessed the supernatural agitation of the pool. He had often seen others step in and lose their maladies, but had been the subject of repeated disappointments and blighted hopes. Observe,

II. THE IMPORTANT QUESTION PROPOSED TO HIM BY THE SAVIOUR. "Wilt thou be made whole?" This was evidently the man's great desire,—the one object of his soul's anxiety. The Saviour, however, probably intended to excite his attention, and to draw forth his hopes. With the disease of sin, there is often a spirit of indifference about the cure. Many do not even believe they are sick, but deliriously exclaim that they are rich and need of nothing, while their true state is disease, wretchedness and misery.

Ministers are sent to teach men their morally diseased

state, and to press the Saviour's question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The willingness of the sinner to be saved, is the first step in his recovery. Observe,

III. THE MERCIFUL MANDATE PRONOUNCED. "Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk," ver. 8. This command at the first view seems unreasonable,—for the man was infirm,—he had no power to walk,—for many years he could not even rise without aid. But when Christ commands, he gives the power to obey. His commands and promises are inseparably allied with each other. He desires the willingness of the heart, and the ability to perform is ever afforded. When Christ speaks, let us hearken. When he commands, however apparently impossible, in faith endeavour to obey, and all things are possible to him that believeth. So it was in this case,—the man's heart joyously leaped at the Saviour's mandate,—and the result was, "And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked," ver. 9.

(1.) Here we have an instantaneous cure.

(2.) A cure effected at the Saviour's bidding. He spake, and it was done.

(3.) A cure full of mercy and compassion to the sufferer.

(4.) A cure without money and without price.

(5.) A cure performed in public.

(6.) A cure indisputable. For, lo, the man stands,—he walks,—he bears the bed or pallet on which he had lain. We leave the cavillings of the envious Jews, who railed at the miracle because it was performed on the Sabbath day. But observe,

IV. THE CAUTION GIVEN TO THE RESTORED MAN. Jesus afterwards found him in the temple, and said unto him, "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee," v. 14. It is reasonable to infer therefore that his infirmity had been the direct effect of his sin. How many of the diseases of the human system

are thus self-procured,—the immediate result of dissipation and vice. Of this the man was reminded, and a holy, circum-spect life was enjoined, “Sin no more,” &c. How needful this caution to every converted sinner. When we remember the remains of evil within the heart,—the allurements of the world and the temptations of Satan,—all should feel the force of the admonition, and watch and pray that they enter not into temptation. The healed man departed no doubt humbly, gratefully,—and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole, ver. 15. Let every one who has been healed of the malady of sin, go and do likewise. Go and proclaim to others the wondrous love and power of the Saviour. Let not shame, nor fear, prevent you from confessing and recommending Christ.

No. VIII.

THE HEALING OF THE NOBLEMAN'S SON.

“So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death,” &c.—*John* iv. 46—54.

NEITHER rank nor age is exempt from the common calamities of life. Man is an heir of trouble, affliction, and death,—and in these the distinctions of society make no difference. The poor often suppose that theirs is the only condition of sorrow, but it only requires a little examination to discover that men of every grade are born to trouble even as the sparks fly upward. We see these sentiments borne

out in the narrative selected for our present meditation. Among the various applicants to Jesus for relief, is the distinguished person before us. In general his followers were the poor and unfortunate,—but here we have a person of rank and affluence among the train of his attendants. Observe,

I. THE PERSON OF THE APPLICANT.

II. THE NATURE OF HIS SUIT.

III. THE TRIUMPHS OF HIS FAITH.

I. THE PERSON OF THE APPLICANT.

1. *His rank.* A certain nobleman. Supposed to be connected by birth with Herod Antipas. His residence seems to have been Capernaum.

2. *His affliction.* Was of a relative kind. His son was sick. Nigh unto death. Most probably an only son. How valuable are all the relationships of life. Hence amid the blessings of domestic life, we should rejoice as those who rejoice not. How slender is the tie which binds us to the objects of our warmest affections.

3. *His extreme solicitude.* Doubtless all that wealth could obtain, or human aid impart, had been done. But the disease yields not, but rather gains strength. The child's life is in imminent peril. He knows not what to do, but at length he hastens to Christ, The distance was about twenty miles. Observe,

II. THE NATURE OF HIS SUIT.

1. *The object of his request.* This is the recovery of his child. He sought of Jesus that he would "heal his son, for he was at the point of death," ver. 47. How beautiful is natural affection! Is it not a beam reflected from the goodness of the Parent of all living?

2. *He seeks that Christ would come down and heal him.* He is anxious that the far-famed physician should visit the dying patient. While the scribes and pharisees scorned the Redeemer, and treated him with rude disdain, this nobleman

would count himself happy in being favored with his gracious presence.

3. *He urges his plea most fervently.* "And besought him," &c. A sense of misery and peril always makes us in earnest. His deepest and tenderest emotions were concerned, and therefore his desires were presented with intensity and ardour. Such should be all our petitions to the Lord. Not that he requires them to induce him to hear and bless us. But because his richest blessings would not be prized, unless eagerly sought for. The fervour of prayer is necessary for us, and not for God. Hence it is the fervent inwrought prayer of the righteous which availeth much. Observe,

III. THE TRIUMPHS OF HIS FAITH. His faith evidently actuated him,

1. *In undertaking the journey.* He had heard of Christ, perhaps seen those on whom his miraculous power had been exerted. He despairs of human help, but yet believes that the Messiah could restore his child. Without some degree of faith, the journey would not have been undertaken. We see his faith,

2. *In the prayer he addressed to Christ.* He besought him that he would come down and heal his son. Here is no doubt expressed. He neither stumbles at his want of power or willingness. He does honour to both. He disputes neither. He seems to take it for granted that he could do it, and he addresses him as if he believed,

"His love was as great as his power,
And neither knew measure nor end."

3. *In the entreaty he further urged.* Jesus said, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe," probably intimating that the Jews were more anxious to behold his wonderous doings, than to hear his doctrine, and receive the truth of his kingdom. Perhaps also intimating that the nobleman was vastly more concerned to have the miracle

of healing wrought, than to attend to the great themes and mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. But thus indirectly repulsed, his faith reiterates his plea,—“Sir, come down, ere my child die.” There is little hope if thy power is not at once exerted.

“Do not turn away thy face,
Mine’s an urgent pressing case.”

We see the power of his faith,

4. *In the gracious answer returned.* “Jesus saith unto him, go thy way: thy son liveth.” And it is further added, that the nobleman “believed the word that Jesus had spoken, and he went his way,” ver. 50. He is satisfied with the reply. He now perceives the great physician can heal at a distance as well as near. He feels assured that his child is spared, therefore with triumphing faith and joy he repairs back to his home. Before he arrives at his dwelling, his servants meet him with the joyful tidings, “Thy son liveth.” And it is discovered that the fever left him, at the very hour that Jesus had spoken the gracious healing word.

Learn,

1. *The divine power of the Son of God.* Well may we exclaim, “A wonderful method of healing he hath.” He has power over all sicknesses, and distance affects not his ability to heal. He can do it by the going forth of his will, by the pronouncing of his word. He can do this in reference to all the moral maladies of the soul.

2. *The necessity, and the importance, of living, vigorous faith.* Faith brings us to Christ. Faith gives tone and power to our pleadings. Faith lays hold of Christ’s strength. Extracts his saving virtue. Faith overcomes all obstacles, levels mountains, exalts vallies,

“Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries it shall be done.”

3. *The interest we should take in the well-being of our children.* How we should feel for them. Desire their moral restoration to the image of God. Plead with the Lord for them. Persevere in the midst of discouragement, and cease not till Christ saith, "Thy son liveth."

No. IX.

THE LEPER CLEANSED.

"And when he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him: And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."—*Matt.* viii. 1—4.

JESUS had just finished his inimitable sermon on the Mount. On his descent, great multitudes followed him. Many of these probably had heard the wonderful words which had flowed from his lips. Among the throng who surrounded the Saviour, we behold one who was a striking spectacle of affliction and misery, He is a leper, and he approaches Christ with venerable awe—bows before him, and says, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." To this appeal, Jesus immediately responds, having touched him with his hand, "I will, be thou clean." And the sacred narrator assures us, that immediately his leprosy was cleansed. ver. 3. Observe,

I. IN THIS LEPER A STRIKING REPRESENTATION OF THE SINNER. Leprosy is one of the most fearful maladies to which human nature can be incident. But in all its worst features it only faintly points out the true nature of sin—the moral leprosy of the heart.

1. *Leprosy dwells in the corruption and impurity of the blood.* So sin in the moral defilement of our nature, by the

first transgression. Man's nature was originally holy and good—by sin it became contaminated, &c.

2. *Leprosy is fearfully contagious.* So is sin. It creates an atmosphere of disease and death. One sinner destroyeth much good. The spirit—the conversation, and the actions of wicked men are all fraught with contagious evil.

3. *Leprosy is of a spreading nature.* So is sin—it defileth the whole man. It affects body, soul, and spirit. It leaves no faculty or power unaffected. “From the crown of the head to the sole of the foot.” In the natural man there is no soundness, &c.

4. *Leprosy is exceedingly painful and loathsome.* So is sin. Its fruit is shame, and sorrow, and wretchedness. “The way of transgressors is hard.” “What fruit had you in those things,” &c. Anxiety, distraction and horror, are the effects of man's naturally diseased state.

5. *The leprosy is incurable by human agency.* God under the law, prescribed the remedies for this fearful malady. But it is evident that the restoration can only be effected by the finger of God. Such also is the case with respect to sin. God alone can pardon, and renew, and sanctify the heart.

“In vain we seek for peace with God,
By methods of our own;
Jesus! there's nothing but thy blood,
Can bring us near thy throne.”

6. *The leper was excluded from the society of the healthy and pure.* Sin excludes from communion with God, and his people. It cast angels out of heaven—our first parents out of paradise. “For what fellowship hath light with darkness,” &c.

7. *Uncured, it terminates in death.* This is James' description of sin—“Sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” This was the malady of the wretched man who ap-

plied to Jesus on this occasion; and sin is the moral disease of human nature. Notice,

II. THAT CHRIST IS ABLE TO CURE BOTH THE LEPROSY OF THE BODY, AND THE MORAL DEFILEMENT OF THE SOUL.

(1.) He possesses all power, both in heaven and on earth.

(2.) He did cure both frequently, in the day of his flesh.

(3.) He came into our world especially to do this.

(4.) He does this by his all-gracious word. He speaks, and it is effected. He sent his word and healed them.

(5.) His precious blood is the fountain for sin and uncleanness. "It cleanseth from all sin." "He is able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him." No case too deep-seated and inveterate—none too protracted and universal for his skill and efficacy.

III. THAT APPLICATION TO CHRIST IS NECESSARY, TO SECURE THE REMOVAL OF OUR MALADIES.

Hence this leper came to Christ—worshipped him—addressed him in earnest supplication, and exercised faith in his ability to restore him. Here is beautifully portrayed the acceptable manner of the sinner's access to Jesus.

1. *He came to Christ.* To this, Christ invites the weary and afflicted sinner. "Come unto me," &c. Matt. xi. 28. He is revealed in the gospel, that we may come to him. He urgeth our return to him, "Come now, and let us reason together," &c.

2. *He worshipped Christ.* Gave him reverent homage. Called him Lord, &c., ver. 2. Such are the feelings we must cherish in drawing near to the Saviour. His Divine nature, and supreme glory and dominion, entitle him to our profoundest reverence, and most sacred veneration and fear. Besides, we are sinners. Creatures of the dust. Unclean, &c.

3. *He addressed Him in earnest supplication.* He felt his misery, and earnestly desired relief. When this feeling is experienced, the soul will long for help, and the prayer

will be both contrite, and fervent, and sincere. It is our great privilege to tell our sorrows—confess our sins, and seek the gracious help of Jesus.

4. *He exercised faith in his ability to heal him.* “If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,” ver. 2. Our faith must rest on Christ’s all-sufficient power. That he has power on earth to forgive sins. We can do more,—we can rest on his own assurance, that he is as *willing*, as he is able. That he wants to save—desirous to save, and will in no case cast out the applicant who comes in faith, and seeks his mercy.

IV. THAT BELIEVING APPLICATION WILL ASSUREDLY BE EFFECTUAL. Hence in this case, the Saviour touched the poor leper, and pronounced him clean. And at once the leprosy was cleansed, v. 3. This is the unvarying experience of every penitent believer that ever came to Christ. Faith in Christ, in every instance, secures the desired help, and obtains the longed-for salvation. Not one ever came and believed, in vain. The word, the oath, and hence also the glory of God are concerned in the saving of the humble trusting soul, that pleads for mercy. Jesus directed the recovered leper to “go to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them.” By this the priest would see the miracle which had been performed. By this his cure would be officially ratified. In this way he was gratefully to honor God. Let the restored sinner go and tell the congregation the great things the Lord hath done for his soul. Unite himself in fellowship with God’s people. And cherish a grateful sense of the Lord’s goodness and mercy to his soul. Forget it not, that Christ alone cleanses from the defilement of sin; and that faith is essential to the enjoyment of his saving favour.

No. X.

THE RESTORED DEMONIACS.

“And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way: And behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time,” &c.—*Matt.* viii. 28—34.

It is truly affecting to contemplate the ravages made by sin in our world. What a troop of diseases affect the body! What a host of maladies and griefs distract the mind! The world is truly a valley of tears—a region of sorrow—a howling wilderness. Everywhere is presented to us the effects of moral evil. Everywhere confusion, sorrow, and wretchedness prevail. During the days of Christ’s sojourning upon earth, we often meet with a concentration of evils, afflicting the same individual. This is particularly true of those who were possessed of devils. Read the history of anguish and suffering, in the case of the child possessed with a dumb devil. This is also strikingly verified in the cases introduced to us in the text. Christ had just been hushing the raging tempest on the sea of Tiberias, into a calm; but no sooner does he land, than he meets with two unhappy men, who were fearfully possessed with devils. Their condition appeared miserable in the extreme; but happy for them, they excited the compassion of the Saviour, and became the joyous subjects of his restoring power.

I. OBSERVE THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF THEIR MISERABLE CONDITION.

1. *They were under the direct controul of evil spirits.* “Possessed with devils.” Entirely subject to the power of

evil agency. And not as some others, under the controul of one, but of many "devils." It would appear that one of these men is the same described by the other evangelists, who was possessed by a legion. Mark v. 9.

All unconverted men are influenced and controlled by the spirit of Satan. He dwelleth in the carnal heart, and rules in the children of disobedience. Often too they are influenced by many evil influences,—as pride, worldliness, sensuality, unbelief, &c., &c. What a debased, wretched condition this is.

2. *They were under the influence of violent and terrific phrensy.* Madness fired their souls. So it is written,—they were exceedingly fierce. Not under the rule of reason, but impelled by violent passion. Not regulated by a good understanding, and sound judgment, but by the excited impulses of a disordered nature. Such is the true state of wicked men. In them reason is dethroned, and passion impels them in their varied courses of infatuated transgression.

3. *They were dangerous to others.* "So that no man might pass by that way." ver. 28. How true of those who give themselves to work iniquity. How they imperil the best interests of their friends, and kindred, and shop-mates, and companions. How they pollute and injure society. What acts of wrong and violence men perpetrate on their fellow-men. How especially true of the assassin, the duellist—the ambitious warrior, and the murderer. Observe,

4. *They had their abode among the dead.* Hence these demoniacs dwelt among the tombs. ver. 28. Every sinner is dead while he liveth. He moves and acts in the region of death, and his paths are the broad downward way of death and destruction. The other evangelists add, that no man could tame them. That however bound, they burst their bonds asunder. Men have attempted to renew human nature by legislative enactments—by education—by the influence of art, and science, and literature; but all necessarily fail to

subdue the power of inward evil, or to cast Satan from the throne of the human heart. Observe,

II. THE HOMAGE THE EVIL SPIRITS PAID TO CHRIST. Hence it is recorded that Christ met these unhappy men, and it is worthy of note, that the spirits which held them in this galling bondage,

1. *Recognised the Redeemer.* Hence they gave him his true title, “Jesus thou Son of the Most High God,” ver. 29. How true the declaration of the apostle, “The devils also believe and tremble.” They saw in Christ the long promised Saviour, the Son of God, who should destroy the works of the devil.

2. *They deprecated his interference.* “Hence they cried—“What have we to do with thee.” This truly indicated their rebellious nature. We have thrown off thy authority. We glory in our disobedience. We delight in iniquity. Besides, it might include the idea, that they had no place in his merciful mediation. No interest in his work of atonement and reconciliation. Not encircled in the provisions of salvation.

3. *They dreaded his displeasure.* “Art thou come hither to torment us before the time.” Here is a recognition of Christ’s authority,—his judicial power, &c. Here is a recognition of the law of retribution. Here is a deep-seated alarm as to a certain period of future punishment. They admit a time of torment, but aver, that the period has not yet arrived.

4. *They seek for admission into the herd of swine.* They saw and felt they could not retain their present dwelling in the miserable demoniacs, so they seek to possess the swine feeding at a distance. Probably they knew that by the destruction of these, the people would become incensed against the Saviour. Jesus, however, gives consent. He suffered them, and they escape from the men, and enter the swine. The sequel is well known. The swine under the fierce influence of these

devils, ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters, ver. 32. Observe,

III. THE CONDUCT OF THE GADARENES. On the destruction of the swine, the swineherds fled into the city, and reported all that had taken place, ver. 33. They related how that the miserable men were restored; but that the fierce spirits had entered the swine, and effected their utter destruction. On this "the whole city came and met Jesus." Surely to behold him—to admire—to adore—to praise him! No; but to beseech Him that he would depart out of their coasts, ver. 34. Observe,

1. *They preferred their swine to the happiness of their fellow creatures.* Instead of rejoicing in the deliverance of their fellow-men from satanic power and misery, they grieve over the loss of their filthy swine.

2. *They preferred their swine to the presence and blessings of Christ.* Jesus the healer of human diseases—the world's philanthropist—man's Saviour, was among them; but their sordid minds prefer the swine, even to the Lord of life and glory. What a true picture of the infatuated influences of sin! How appropriate to men who prefer their iniquities to Christ. The wrathful man his revenge. The arrogant man his pride. The drunken man his cups. The sordid man his wealth. The sensual man his haunts. And each man his selfish ends, and his evil desires. Christ took them at their word, and he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. chap. ix. 1.

The restored demoniacs are seen clothed, and in their right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus. They seek to go with Christ, to be near their deliverer; but are sent to shew their friends what great things God had done for them.

Learn,

1. *The fearful tendency of sin.* To enfeeble, to infatuate, and to destroy.

2. *The gracious power of Jesus.* To rescue, and to save.

No. XI.

THE TWO BLIND MEN.

“And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou* Son of David,” &c.—*Matt.* xx. 29—34.

WHEREVER Jesus went, he bare with him both the ability and desire to do good to the children of sorrow and affliction. Like the good shepherd, he was ever seeking the wandering sheep. He was emphatically the minister of the poor, and the friend of the wretched. Wherever distress and anguish were presented to his eye, or assailed his ear, his generous bosom heaved with goodness, and his sacred hands distributed abroad the blessings of his grace. And it made no difference what was the character of the malady to be removed, or the blessing to be imparted. Fevers, dropsies, palsies, demoniacal possessions were all alike to him. By his energetic voice, afflictions and diseases of every kind were exiled, and blessings of every variety were bestowed. Our present subject relates to the miracle wrought on behalf of two blind men who sat by the wayside near unto Jericho, begging. Jesus having to pass that way, the beggars lifted up their voice and entreated his mercy. To their supplications he lent a ready ear, and in the fulness of his compassion he granted them the desire of their hearts. Observe,

I. THE CONDITION OF THESE MEN.

II. THEIR APPLICATION TO CHRIST. And,

III. THE CURE WHICH HE WROUGHT ON THEM. Observe,

I. THE CONDITION OF THESE MEN. Two words fully express their state.

1. *They were blind.* Deprived of the unspeakably precious blessing of sight. A calamity which none can duly understand, but those who are the unhappy subjects of it. Many of the joys and pleasures of life are received through the medium of the eyes. The works of God are an unknown blank to the blind. The face of nature, and the countenances of friends, impart no thrill of gladness to the blind. The luxury of books are not within the province of the blind. Ah, sad deprivation—mournful state! Yet spiritual blindness is the greater calamity of the two. And this is the condition of all unregenerated persons. One of the characteristics of the sinner is, that he is “blind.” That he is a child of the night and of darkness. He beholds nothing glorious in the divine character, works, or word. He sees no beauty in the kingdom of grace. Ignorant of himself—of the Saviour,—and of the way of peace. These men were not only blind, but—

2. *Indigent.* Poverty is often the lot of the blind. Hence, these two men depended for their subsistence on the precarious alms of the people who passed by the place where they sat begging. Spiritual poverty is the condition of all who have not obtained the pearl of great price. They may fancy themselves rich and increased in goods, and that they stand in need of nothing: but the truth is, they are poor, and wretched, and naked. In fact, their misery is such, that they are ready to perish. Like the famishing prodigal who exclaimed, “I perish with hunger.” Notice,

II. THEIR APPLICATION TO CHRIST. Here several things deserve particular notice.

1. *The Saviour’s opportune visit.* He passed by where they sat, or they might have lived and died in their blindness. They sought not Christ, but he came near to them. Just so in reference to Christ and the gospel. Jesus comes into our

world to save sinners. He seeks the perishing sinner. We are found of Christ, and not Christ of us. There was,

2. *The announcement of His approach.* "They heard that Jesus passed by." Doubtless of Christ, and his fame, they had often heard before. But now he was near to them, and this was the crisis of hope to those afflicted men. The gospel proclaims to sinners, that Christ the Saviour is near to them. In his humanity he is their brother, and in his divinity he is not far from any who seek his grace and desire salvation. See Rom. x. 8—15.

3. *The petition they presented.*

(1.) It was a plea for mercy. They did not claim the Saviour's gracious interference.

(2.) It was a plea for themselves. The removal of their own misery.

(3.) It was a plea of faith. They honoured Christ as the Messiah, the Son of God.

(4.) It was most earnest and importunate. In all these features, the prayers of the penitent sinner should resemble those of the blind men. Notice,

4. *The difficulties they met with.* "The multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace." How inconsiderate and cruel! How unfeeling and base! They ought rather to have felt and sympathized with them, and then joined in their prayer. Sin has transformed man's heart into coldness and stone. It has frozen up the best emotions of the soul. Sinners seeking the Saviour will often meet with similar difficulties. The world will cry to them to hold their peace. Cold and formal professors will do the same, and often friends and kindred, who see no beauty in piety, nor necessity for spiritual anxiety, will do their utmost to hinder them in their fervent efforts to obtain the mercy of Christ. But they cried the more. They reiterated their earnest plea, and did not present it in vain. For observe,

III. THE CURE WHICH CHRIST WROUGHT ON THEM.

1. *Their cry arrested the Redeemer on the way.* “And Jesus stood still.” He could not pass on. The prayer of the wretched held him to the spot. He stood to contemplate their misery. He stood to listen to their cry. He stood to pity their state.

2. *He kindly enquired as to their desire.* “What will ye that I shall do unto you?” ver. 32. They reply, “that our eyes may be opened,” v. 33. O yes, this was their one misery, and the removal of this, their one desire. Hope would now begin to dawn upon them. Already was the day breaking.

3. *He compassionately granted their request.* “He touched their eyes.” And instantly light breaks in upon them. And now behold they see. Marvellous touch—most wondrous act! It is added that “they followed Christ,” ver. 34. Doubtless out of love and gratitude. To extol him, and celebrate his praise. We would fain conclude, that the eyes of their understanding were also opened, and that they became his disciples indeed and of a truth. All sinners sensible of their blindness and misery, may thus hopefully apply to the Saviour. “Whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Have you felt the evil of your natural state? Have you earnestly sought the Redeemer? Have you in the midst of affliction cried the more? Have you obtained your suit? Mark, none but Christ can open the eyes of the mind, or convey peace and salvation to the soul.

No. XII.

THE DUMB SPIRIT CAST OUT.

“As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.”—*Matt.* ix. 32—33.

It would appear that the person on whom this miracle was wrought was not one deaf, and therefore dumb by nature from his birth, but one whose speech was prevented by an evil spirit dwelling in him. In some of the cases of persons possessed with devils, they were excited to violent ravings, and became dangerous to those around them. In other cases they appeared to have been deprived of the use of their limbs—while in others, as in this case, the organs of hearing or speaking, only were affected. It is obvious, that this must have been a great calamity, inflicting extreme wretchedness both on the sufferer and his friends. And humanly speaking, the case was hopeless. For by what earthly instrumentality could the demon be expelled, and his miserable victim be rescued from his grasp? Jesus, however, came expressly to free men from Satan’s galling yoke, and to open the prison door to such as were bound. We see this beautifully exemplified in the case of the man before us. Observe his malady—his introduction to Christ—and the deliverance effected. Notice,

I. HIS MALADY. “He was a dumb man possessed with a devil,” ver. 32. As we consider his dumbness to have arisen from the power of the evil spirit, let us advert,

1. *To the spirit that dwelt in him.* An evil spirit had possession of his mind and body. He was the miserable

victim of satanic agency and power. A striking representation of the human heart subject to the wicked control of Satan. And let it be remembered that all men are either under the dominion of God or of the Devil. Every heart is the throne of the Holy Spirit, or of the Spirit of Evil. And in all unrenewed, unbelieving souls, Satan has his seat. He dwells in them. He bids them go and they go, and come and they come, and do this or that and they do it. His yoke he places on their neck, and his fetters and manacles on their faculties and powers. How debased, ignominious, and wretched, is such a state!

2. *He was dumb.* The power of speech is one of the distinguishing features of human beings. Doubtless the inferior creatures can convey their desires, &c., to their own species. But it is reserved for man to possess the high endowment of speech, to enjoy the blessing of conversation. Thus reason sheds abroad her light. Thus mind has intercourse with mind. And thus heart enjoys delightful communion with kindred hearts. Happy when the power of speech is under the rule of enlightened reason, and happier still when the conversation is always seasoned with grace. But there is a spiritual dumbness, as well as that which applies to the organs of natural speech. This is true,

(1.) Of those who disregard the Divine works and word. Who never speak of God. Of his character, works, or ways. They are silent concerning the Divine attributes and glory.

(2.) *Of those who never pray.* Who never speak to God in supplication and intercession. Strangers to the language of devotion.

(3.) Of those who never speak for God. By extolling his goodness, or celebrating his mercy. How many, in all these respects, are possessed with a dumb devil. But observe,

II. HE WAS INTRODUCED TO CHRIST. "They brought him" to Jesus. Here was consideration, kindness, true compassion. Doubtless they commiserated the man, and

had faith in the Saviour. The great work devolving on the members of the church of Christ, is to bring men to him. It is theirs to feel for the wretched and the perishing, who are without God and without hope in the world. They can well feel and compassionate their state, when they remember their own former miserable condition. They know the power and preciousness of Christ. His ability and willingness to save. On them therefore it devolves to employ their talents and influence in bringing souls to the Redeemer.

(1.) Parents should labour to do this with their children.

(2.) Teachers with their juvenile charge.

(3.) Christians with all their friends. This is the truest benevolence, the most noble and Godlike charity to others. This man was brought to Christ, into the immediate presence of him before whom devils feared and trembled. Observe,

III. THE DELIVERANCE EFFECTED. The details of the cure are not presented. The processes not given. But it is clear that the devil was cast out, &c.

1. *The man was dispossessed.* The malevolent intruding spirit was cast out. Probably by the mere bidding of the Saviour. Hence the poet rapturously sings,

“Jesus the name high over all,
In hell, or earth, or sky :
Angels and men before it fall,
And devils fear and fly.”

Thus Christ also by his converting grace delivers men from the power of the devil and from the dominion of sin.

2. *His mouth was opened.* He now “spoke.” The cause was removed, and the evil effect ceased. Would he not speak gratefully and joyously! Would he not exult and glorify Christ! Would he not

“Tell to those around,
What a dear Saviour he had found.”

Grace opens the mouth in thanksgiving and praise. "He hath put," says the psalmist, "A new song into my mouth," "even praise to our God." Psalm xl. 3. "I will praise thee: for though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away: and behold thou comfortedst me." Isa. xii. 1.

Learn,

1. *The malevolence and power of the prince of darkness.*
2. *The misery of human nature through the entrance of sin into our world.*
3. *The grace and efficacy of the Lord Jesus.*
4. *Our duty to those who are far from Christ, and ignorant of his favour and love.*
5. *The glory which redounds to Christ from his wondrous doings.* Ver. 33.

No. XIII.

THE EXPULSION OF THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT.

"And in the synagogue there was a man, who had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, let us alone. what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art: the Holy One of God," &c.—*Luke iv. 33—37.*

ON a variety of occasions the Redeemer manifested his Divine power over evil spirits who possessed the bodies and souls of men. On several of these occasions the Saviour conversed with the evil spirits he expelled, which completely overthrows the hypothesis that the persons were merely afflicted with diseases which deranged the mind, and that the representations of their having evil spirits were only given in accordance with the superstitions of the age. It seems too, that the spirits invariably recognized the person of Christ,

and confessed his divinity and power. On this occasion Jesus met with the unhappy man in the synagogue, and we are directed,

I. TO THE CONFESSION THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT MADE CONCERNING THE REDEEMER. He spake and said, "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God," ver. 34. Here Christ's righteousness and purity are admitted. So far from treating him as an impostor, or being in league with Beelzebub, they,

1. *Declare* "*He is the Holy One of God.*"

(1.) God's Son—God's servant," ver. 34.

(2.) Having God's holy nature and attributes.

(3.) Formed as to his manhood, by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost.

(4.) Coming into the world to exhibit in all its complete excellency, God's holy law.

(5.) On the holy mission of redeeming men from sin, and bringing them to the blessedness of personal holiness.

(6.) In the world for the express purpose of setting up a holy kingdom—a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. How numerous the testimonies to Christ's holiness. The testimony of the Father in the voice which spake from heaven. The testimony of Pilate. The testimony of Judas. The testimony of devils—all unite in exhibiting the Saviour as holy, harmless, and undefiled. This confession was,

2. *Bold and public.* "Cried with a loud voice." So that all around might hear the testimony given. And it was most explicit. "I know thee who thou art," verse 34. Observe,

3. *It was deprecatory.* "Let us alone: what have we to do with thee," &c. ver. 34. Mark (c. i. 24,) adds, that the spirit also said, "Art thou come to destroy us?" Here was the language of dread,—of guilty shame. They knew that their time was limited, that their power was circumscribed,

and that their hellish rule and dominion was to be overthrown by the Son of God. All this is clearly implied in the deprecatory appeal of the unclean spirit. Observe,

II. THE COURSE THE REDEEMER ADOPTED.

1. *He rebuked the unclean spirit.* "Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace," ver. 35. He thus exercised his authority over the spirits of the unseen world. He silences his speech though it confessed his Messiahship. Christ seeks not the constrained, terrific acknowledgment of rebellious demons,—but the humble, penitent confession of contrite, believing sinners.

2. *He bade him to come out of the man.* "Come out of him," exclaimed the benevolent Saviour. "Leave thy usurped throne. Thou hast no right to thy dwelling. He is my creature, the object of my care, and the subject of my saving compassion. Thy rule is one of ignorance, disease, wretchedness, and woe. I have come expressly to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison doors to them that are bound." Therefore his mandate of mercy is heard, "Come out of him." Notice,

III. THE RESULTS WHICH FOLLOWED.

1. *The unclean spirit gives a last struggle to injure his victim.* "And when the devil had thrown him in the midst," &c. Mark adds, "And when the unclean spirit had torn him," ch. i. 26. Full of dire malignity he essays to do his worst before he leaves his abode. Showing his cruel, insatiable desire to destroy. Luke remarks, in connection with this violent effort of the spirit, "And hurt him not," v. 35. Christ knew the will and power of the demon, so as to overrule and restrain his diabolical designs. He interposed his almighty arm to save the sufferer.

2. *He came out of him.* Expelled by the high and supreme power of the Son of God. Miraculous, happy deliverance! Glorious emancipation from the unclean, diabolical power of this malignant spirit.

3. *The people gave homage and glory to Christ.* “And they were all amazed and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.” In this profession, the dominion and power of Christ are distinctly recognized. His word is magnified. And the adoring reverence of the people is given to God’s anointed Son.

4. *The fame of Christ was spread abroad.* “And the fame of him went out into every place and country round about.” For this miracle was so public, that many witnessed it. It was so palpable, that none could deny it. It was so wonderful, that all were astonished. And it was so gracious and merciful, that the benevolent feelings of the multitude were delighted with it. Hence the fame of it was spread abroad in every direction.

APPLICATION.

1. *The unrenewed mind is under the power of the unclean spirit.* Satan in his nature and designs, and works, is emphatically unclean. He is the enemy of purity. He lives in the region of rebellion and impiety. His work is to spread defilement and sin. And observe, he reigns and rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience.

2. *Such who are thus influenced are in circumstances of misery and peril.* It is a wretched, debased condition. It is one of imminent danger. For such are in a state of condemnation, and the wrath of God abideth on them. They are the objects of the Divine disapprobation, and utterly unfit for a heaven of holiness. Reflect on this,—you who are under the power and influence of the spirit of evil.

3. *Christ alone has power to save and deliver.* It is his office and especial work. He came expressly to effect this. He has delivered myriads. He delights to save and bless. He rejoices over the spirits who are disenthralled from the satanic yoke.

4. *In the Gospel this deliverance is proclaimed unto you.* “God having raised up Jesus, sent him to bless you, turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” Acts iii. 26.

“He breaks the power of cancell'd sin,
And sets the prisoner free :
His blood can make the foulest clean ;
His blood availed for me.”

No. XIV.

THE CENTURION'S SERVANT.

“Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die,” &c.—*Luke vii. 1—10.*

FEW occupations can be more unfavourable to religion than that of a soldier. The whole aspect of war is adverse to the spirit of the Gospel, and practice of true religion. War is essentially an evil from beneath, an evil pandering to the worst passions of the human heart. It breathes forth malevolence and revenge: it gloats in human misery and groans. Christianity, like its Divine founder, breathes universal good will. It is full of benignity, kindness, and love. It bears in its triumphant course the olive branch of peace, and it rejoices in the happiness of all classes of men. It sings, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth and good will towards men.” Yet the army has not been utterly void of pious men. In spite of unfavourable circumstances there have been soldiers, sincere and devoted disciples of Jesus. We have several centurions referred to in the New Testament. And Colonel Gardiner and others, in

modern times, have been distinguished for their eminent piety. Our text relates to one of these; one whose strong faith drew forth from Christ the highest encomium. Let us then contemplate,

I. HIS CHARACTER AND APPLICATION TO CHRIST. It is obvious,

1. *That he was a Gentile.* One who had not always enjoyed the advantages and privileges of the Jewish religion. No doubt of pagan origin, and most likely educated according to the system of pagan idolatry. He was a commander of a hundred men in the Roman army.

2. *He was a Jewish proselyte.* He had been delivered from idolatry and superstition, and had been brought to know, and love, and obey the Jehovah of Israel.

3. *He had been a liberal benefactor of the Jewish religion.* For the elders of the Jews said of him, "He loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue," ver. 5. So that his was not a cold profession, but an ardent and liberal attachment to the worship of God.

4. *He was a most compassionate Master.* His servant is said to have been "dear unto him." No doubt he was a faithful, good servant. Perhaps an old servant. One who ever consulted his master's interests. And had won his confidence, affection, and esteem. How delightful are such instances of reciprocated attachments between servants and masters. But this servant was now sick, grievously afflicted, ready to die. We learn from Matthew, c. viii. v. 6, that it was a severe attack of the palsy. The centurion sympathized with his suffering servant. Did not expel him from his home, or leave him to the care of strangers, but commiserating his affliction, he personally laboured to obtain for him relief. Beautiful instance of goodness and condescension!

5. *He applied to Jesus on his servant's behalf.* He did so through the Jewish elders.

(1.) "He sent unto him the elders of the Jews." He deemed himself unfit to make the application, and concluded that these officials in the Jewish synagogue would succeed better.

(2.) He exhibited extraordinary humility. As Jesus was on his way to his house he sent servants unto him, saying, "I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof," ver. 6. What low thoughts of himself, and what exalted conceptions of the Redeemer! Yet abstractedly considered, how true, and not only true of the centurion, but of every fallen child of man. Yet how rare is this holiness of heart, this humility of spirit.

(3.) He exercised astonishing faith. He believed that dangerous as his servant was, Christ could heal him.—He believed he could heal him without coming to him,—without seeing him. He believed that the mandate of Christ was enough. Hence he said, "But say in a word, and my servant shall be healed." Just speak, and it shall be done. Issue thine orders, and the sickness shall depart. He illustrates the working of his faith, by stating, "I am a man of authority, having under me soldiers, And I say unto one, Go, and he goeth," &c., verse 8. Hence he admitted Christ's universal authority and power over the maladies which afflicted mankind, and he believed that the word given was enough. Marvellous faith! especially in one who had been a Gentle idolator. How it contrasted with the unbelief of the Jews. How true the Divine saying, "The first shall be last, and the last shall be first." In reference to his application to Christ, observe,

II. THE SUCCESS WHICH ATTENDED IT. Notice,

1. *Christ assents to the first requirement.* When the elders besought him to come, "Jesus at once went with them," ver. 6. He did not hesitate nor delay. When the nobleman sought Christ to go and heal his son, he went not, but sent his word, and healed him. When the centurion applies for

his servant, he hastens towards his dwelling. Was it because the applicant was a Gentile, or because the sufferer was a servant? He came to save all, but especially the chief of sinners. He came to bless all, but especially the poor and the wretched.

2. *He restored the servant.* It is not said how, whether by an audible command, or by a secret conveyance of his power,—but he did it, and he did it at once and effectually. For it is written, that “they that were sent returned to the house, and found the servant whole that had been sick,” ver. 10.

3. *He commended the centurion’s faith.* Addressing the people as well as the elders of the Jews, he said, “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,” ver. 9. Even the most devout and spiritual of the Jews, favoured with the oracles of truth, the descendants of wrestling Jacob and prevailing Israel, had not evinced such entire and implicit faith or confidence in his healing power.

4. *He indicated the salvation of many Gentiles in various parts of the earth, and the exclusion of many highly favoured Jews.* Ver. 11, 12.

Learn from the subject,

1. *A lesson of humanity.* Imbibe the kindly spirit of the centurion. Feel for your servants, and seek their temporal and spiritual welfare.

2. *A lesson of faith.* Believe in Christ heartily, fully, implicitly.

No. XV.

THE RESTORING OF THE BLIND YOUNG MAN.

“And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man who was blind from *his* birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” &c.—*John ix.* 1—7.

THE case of this blind man is given at very great length by the evangelist, as it was the occasion of much dispute among the Jews. In the account furnished, there are many highly important subjects introduced, each of which would furnish ample matter for a discourse. It may be well for us therefore to attend to some of these, as they are presented before us. Observe,

I. THE STATE OF THE SUFFERER. He was blind, and had been so from his birth, v. 1.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the calamity of blindness. Its privations and sorrows are manifest to all. This man had been blind from his birth. Hence it was probably the result of some organic defect. He had never beheld the face of nature, or seen the light of the sun. Notice,

II. THE INTERROGATION OF THE DISCIPLES. And his disciples asked, “Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ver. 2. It was the general belief of the Jews, that extraordinary calamities arose invariably from heinous sins. Hence they concluded that those on whom the tower of Siloam fell, were sinners above all men. Hence when they saw the accumulated sorrows and sufferings of Jesus, they deemed him smitten of God and afflicted. In this case they concluded that the parents, or this man had incurred the displeasure of the Almighty in that he had been born blind. It would seem also from the very reference to

the man himself, that they must have believed in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, or that he could have sinned in his mother's womb. This idea of sin bringing on itself immediate physical suffering is still common—may arise from a superstitious dread which guilt in the mind produces. Notice,

III. THE REPLY OF THE SAVIOUR. He declared that neither the man nor his parents had sinned, especially so as to procure this calamity, ver. 3. But that God had permitted this affliction, that his wondrous works might be made manifest in him. Here is an undoubted reference to the power which he possessed, and which he was about to put forth for his restoration. Now we should learn from this not to judge nor indulge in evil surmisings respecting those who are destitute or greatly afflicted, or who are the subjects of grievous and distressing calamities. Notice,

IV. THE DECLARATION OF CHRIST CONCERNING HIS OWN MISSION. "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day," &c., ver. 3. He now indicates further, that he had been especially sent to do the miraculous and beneficent works of God. That this was his day. The period allotted and appointed for his marvellous doings, and that he must do it now, for night was coming, the night of death, when no man could work. How truly striking and affecting this declaration. If Jesus, who was clothed with miraculous power, thus felt the importance of diligence in his great vocation, how much more should we be constantly impressed with the supreme necessity of prompt and faithful obedience to the claims of God. Observe,

V. HE ASSERTS HIMSELF TO BE THE LUMINARY OF THE WORLD. "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world," ver. 5. He is the great and only sun of the moral system. He the only orb of spiritual day. He the only source of light and blessedness. He creates natural light, and makes the eye to see it and rejoice in it.

He makes spiritual light, and causes the soul to enjoy and delight in it. Then observe,

VI. THE MIRACLE HE WROUGHT.

1. *He employed certain means.* Yet how unlikely to benefit the blind man. "He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay," ver. 6. All this was much more likely to make a seeing man blind, than to give sight to one already blind. But Jesus often used means, and they were generally of an extraordinary character, and, humanly speaking, unlikely to secure the end contemplated. Thus he concealed, in some measure, his overwhelming glory.

2. *He gave certain instructions.* He told the man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam, v. 7. Here was a trial of the blind man's faith and obedience. Thus also the miracle would be wrought before a great number of witnesses. Here also implicit obedience in the use of appointed means would be sanctioned. Notice,

VII. THE HAPPY RESULT. He went his way as Jesus directed. He washed. And came back, seeing. How obvious that the spirit of Christ's power and mercy went with him. And in the use of Christ's appointed means, he obtained his sight. Herein the glory of Christ was conspicuously displayed. And herein his love and compassion were beautifully set forth. Thus two ancient predictions were accomplished, and the Saviour's profession of the Messiahship fully exemplified. Yet the effects were not such as we should have anticipated. For we behold,

1. The Jews filled with envy and unbelief, ver. 16—28.

2. His parents were ensnared through the fear of man, ver. 20—21. But happily,

3. The young man confessed Christ, vindicated his character, and became a believing and honourable disciple, ver. 25—30, 35—38.

No. XVI.

THE CURE OF THE DEAF MAN.

“And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue,” &c.—*Mark vii. 32.*

NUMEROUS as the Redeemer's miracles were, yet variety as to the mode of effecting them, was constantly manifested. To some he simply spake, and the cure was wrought—with others, means were employed—and in the use of these, the miraculous power was communicated. It was obvious that all cases and circumstances were alike to Jesus, and that all power was given unto him both in heaven and on earth. We often see too, that the benevolent emotions of the people led them to bring the miserable and the afflicted to Christ. It was so on the present occasion. He was now passing through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one who was truly an object of compassion. Observe,
The nature of his affliction. The miracle performed. And the effects which were produced.

I. THE NATURE OF HIS AFFLICTION.

1. *He was deaf.* The sense of hearing is especially precious. It is one of the main inlets of knowledge and enjoyment. It is one of the chief links in social intercourse, and one of the sweetest bonds of communion with our fellow-men. The want of this sense greatly isolates man from his fellow-creatures, and dries up one of the few streams of happiness which this world affords.

2. *He had an impediment in his speech.* It was with extreme difficulty he could confer with those around him.

Thus his affliction was greatly increased. Yet it was his mercy that he was not absolutely dumb. That, though with difficulty, he could have intercourse with his friends. Notice,

II. THE MIRACLE PERFORMED. Antecedently to the exertion of the Saviour's miraculous interference, he was brought to Christ that he might put his hand upon him, ver. 32. Then observe,

(1.) Jesus took him aside. Perhaps to conceal from the multitude the mode of the miracle, lest they might presumptuously endeavour to imitate him, or it might be to avoid ostentation.

(2.) He then put his fingers into his ears, &c., ver. 33. Obviously to sanctify the use of means, and to indicate to the afflicted man, that his Divine power was about to be directed to the seat of his maladies.

(3.) He acknowledged his Father, and evinced the deep compassion of his spirit. And looking up to heaven he sighed, &c., ver. 34. Here we see the pious emotions of Jesus. The pity of his soul, which produced such commiseration for the afflicted children of men.

(4.) He pronounced the cure-working word. "And saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened: ver. 34. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain," ver. 35. Is not this a striking representation of the sinners' state—deaf to the Divine commandments—whose mouths glorify not God; having no communion with the Creator, nor spiritual intercourse with his people. When such are brought to feel their need, and to come to Jesus, by his omnific yet gracious word, he unstops the ears of the deaf, and he makes the dumb to sing for joy. Notice,

III. THE EFFECTS WHICH WERE PRODUCED. Doubtless in the man, grateful joy. But in the people,

1. *Wonder and admiration.* Christ charged them to tell no man,—but their feelings of astonishment and delight

could not be restrained. Hence it is written, "So much the more a great deal they published it," ver. 36.

2. *They extolled and glorified Christ.* For astonished they exclaimed, "He hath done all things well," v. 37. His works are wondrous, beyond the power of man, and they are all gracious and benevolent. He curses not,—he inflicts no woes nor calamities,—but "maketh the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak." Moses, Elijah, and Elisha wrought miracles of terror and judgment. Jesus, only miracles of love and mercy. "He hath done all things well." How many could have joyously responded to the declaration. How many blind and paralytic, and lame and leprous, had experienced the mighty energy of his arm, and the tender compassions of his soul. And is not this,

(1.) The testimony of all his saints on earth? Do they not all bear witness to the power and grace of the Saviour. Are they not all the trophies of his mercy. The language of each converted soul is, "He hath done all things well."

(2.) This is the testimony of all the redeemed in heaven. All the beatified around the throne extol the wondrous love of Jesus. All their ears were opened to his word, by his power. All their tongues were loosed to sing his praise at his bidding. And through all eternity, with adoring wonder and grateful praise, they will exclaim—"He hath done all things well." We just ask, "What think ye of Christ?"

(1.) Have you ever contemplated his Divine character and glory?

(2.) Have you ever reflected on his mighty works and marvellous doings? How he displayed these during his ministry on earth?

(3.) How grace alone shone in all the miracles he wrought. Did he not do all things well?

(4.) Are you the subjects of his saving favour? Has he removed your spiritual maladies? Enabled you to hear and

rejoice in his word,—to bless and glorify his name. Is it not the Christian's duty and delight to spread abroad the fame of the Redeemer? To tell to others that He hath indeed done all things well.

No. XVII.

CHRIST'S POWER OVER THE WINDS AND THE SEA.

“And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep,” &c.—*Matt.* viii. 23—27.

THE way of duty is often the way of trouble and temporal peril. The most devout and ardent affection for Christ, does not exempt from sorrow or tribulation. Hence we often see the most eminent saints passing through floods and storms on their way to the kingdom. Our present subject is introduced by the statement that Christ entered into a ship, and his disciples followed him. It was their duty to follow where he guided—it was surely their safety, to be where his presence was afforded. Yet though in the evident path of duty they were exposed to great apparent danger, from which they were only rescued by the wonder-working arm of the Redeemer. Our attention is directed,

I. TO THE FEARFUL TEMPEST. “And behold there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves,” ver. 24. Nothing is more awfully sublime than a storm at sea. When the waves roll mountains high. When the winds howl, and when the largest ships are tossed as insignificant fragments on the mighty waters. The psalmist has given a very vivid description of such a

scene with its attendant perils: Psa. cvii. 25, 31. On this occasion the vessel was covered with the foaming waves, and destruction seemed at hand. Amidst this scene of grandeur and terror we are directed,

II. TO THE SLUMBERING SAVIOUR. Jesus "was asleep," ver. 24. Wearied and exhausted with the toils of the day, his human nature required the restoring influences of balmy sleep. He had no sin, and no fear. Besides he had all dominion over heaven, earth, and hell. What a mighty blessing is sleep to the tired and toil-worn frame! Happy those who sleep under the sweet assurance of God's favour, and who can say in the pious language of the psalmist, "I laid me down and slept: I awaked: for the Lord sustained me." Notice,

III. THE ANXIOUS AND ALARMED DISCIPLES. Their danger appeared imminent, and therefore we are not surprised at the manifestation of their fears. Yet there were many circumstances which might have considerably allayed them. They had this especially to cheer them,—that their Lord and Master was with them. Could they imagine that he could perish? And yet he was in the same vessel, and exposed to the same danger. And if he perished not, then their safety was surely guaranteed. But for the moment sense prevailed over faith, and fears overwhelmed them. Ever since sin entered into the world, man has been the victim of fear. Guilt and alarm are wedded to one another. With perfect purity there would be no dread. Had the faith of the disciples been in vigorous exercise, it would have surmounted the highest wave, and have outridden the most terrible storm. Observe,

IV. THEIR EARNEST PRAYER. They came to the Saviour and awoke him, "saying, Lord save us! we perish!" ver. 25. Their prayer indicated great alarm and great anxiety: also utter self-distrust, and confidence in the power of Christ to deliver them.

(1.) Their alarm was culpable, though natural. Faith would have overcome the timidity of nature.

(2.) Their anxiety was human, though in its intensity unnecessary. To desire to be delivered from danger is in harmony with the law of our being. But under Christ's care and pilotage, we may venture to trust all to him.

(3.) Their utter distrust of themselves was both rational and pious. What could they do amidst the fury of the blast. How impotent is man with all his skill and power, and vauntings, when the elements war with him!

(4.) Their confidence in Christ was praiseworthy, and worthy of our imitation. He can deliver,—he will deliver,—he delights to deliver,—he has engaged to deliver. To him we may confidently and hopefully appeal. And on this occasion the Redeemer awoke, and first he chides their unbelieving fears—"Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" ver. 26. Then with all the grandeur of his divinity, "He arose," looked upon the angry raging billows. He spake with his omnific voice, rebuking the turbulent elements, and there was a great calm. What a scene for devout, adoring contemplation! The ease with which the majestic Jesus did this wondrous deed. The instant effects:—immediately, without delay, the elements heard and obeyed their God. And the calm was great, entire; not only were the winds hushed, and the waves quieted, but the lake became placid and tranquil at once, and the rolling vessel rested in peaceful security and quietness on its placid bosom. Well might they exclaim with marvellous zeal, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" ver. 27. We have a similar miracle of grace wrought when the Saviour,

1. *Calms the troubled conscience of the anxious sinner.* When the Lord has wrought conviction of sin in the soul. When a sense of guilt raises the billows of the Divine wrath before the eyes of the penitent. When with deep alarm

spreading through the soul, the exclamation is heard,—“Lord, save or I perish!” Then Jesus, in the majesty of his grace, speaks to the soul and says, Thy sins are forgiven thee, and instantly within the bosom of the believing penitent there is a great calm. When he,

2. *Delivers the believing soul in the day of fear and trouble.* Often the saint of the Lord is tossed on seas of sorrow,—surrounded by tempests of trouble. Job was called to pass through a series of these. So David, and so most of the Lord’s people. Times of bitter persecution are such. Times of severe bodily affliction are such. Times of great spiritual conflict and temptation. Then when the soul goes in confidence to the Lord, and exercises faith and hope in his delivering mercy, he rebukes the wind and the waves, and there is a great calm.

3. *There will be the fearful tempest of the Divine wrath at the last day.* With the great scene of the conflagration of the world. When the hills and mountains shall be moved out of their places,—when the sun shall become as sack-cloth,—the moon as blood, and the stars appear to fall,—when one fierce flame shall envelop the globe, with all that it contains, then the Christian relying on Jesus, interested in his death, and leaning on his mighty arm, shall be safe, and be effectually delivered from the destruction in which all the ungodly shall be eternally involved. Learn,

1. The majesty and power of Jesus.

2. The importance of a vigorous faith.

3. The certainty of deliverance to all who trust in his name. Let our prayer be,

“Thou that didst rule the angry hour,

And tame the tempest’s mood,

O send thy spirit forth in power,

O’er our dark souls to brood.

Thou that didst bow the billow’s pride,

Thy mandates to fulfil;—

Speak, speak to passion’s raging tide,

Speak, and say—‘Peace be still.’”

No. XVIII.

THE RESTORATION OF THE WITHERED HAND.

“And, behold, there was a man who had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him. And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?” &c.—*Matt.* xii. 10—13.

IT is impossible to read the miracles of Christ without being struck with the vain and hypocritical spirit which the scribes and pharisees often evinced. When they could not deny the miracles Jesus wrought, they endeavoured captiously to wrangle either with the manner or time in which they were wrought. Hence often they are introduced as appealing against the Saviour exerting his Almighty arm on the Sabbath day. Their regard to that, seems to have greatly outweighed their love and compassion to the afflicted and miserable around them. This was the case with the man whose hand was restored on the present occasion. Jesus met their false and hypocritical reasoning by distinctly stating that it was lawful to do well on the Sabbath day, and illustrates it by the beautiful simile, of delivering a sheep from a pit into which it might have fallen on that day, ver. 11. And if they did not doubt the propriety of this, how much more proper still was it to do good to man, who is of so much more value than a sheep. At present, however, we have to do with the miracle Jesus wrought on the occasion. Observe,

I. THE AFFLICTION STATED. It was evidently one of paralysis. The man's hand was withered. It is supposed

that the whole arm was affected, and Luke says it was his right hand. Doubtless this would prevent the man from labouring for his daily bread. So that it is probable he was poor and destitute as well as afflicted. These often go together. The lame and the diseased should ever excite our commiseration, and elicit all the help we can afford. When Jesus saw the man, he compassionated his state, and purposed to restore him. Observe then,

II. THE MIRACLE WHICH HE WROUGHT. The Saviour,

1. *Issued a command which it seemed impossible to obey.* "He saith to the man, Stretch forth thine hand," ver. 13. The hand being withered had long since ceased to obey the volitions of the mind, therefore it would appear in vain to give such a direction. But the Saviour's commands ever involve the idea of ability for their performance. Yet here unbelief might have cavilled, only faith would be found ready to obey. But observe,

2. *The man wished to do Christ's bidding, and the power was given.* He did not reason, nor cavil, nor doubt. But when he heard the mandate of the Saviour, his heart rejoiced in it, and he made the effort, and lo, it was stretched out. It is clear that this power was not inherent in him. That he could not have done it, until the Saviour's command had been given. It was the power of God harmonizing with the faith of the man. The ability of the Saviour put forth in the workings of the afflicted man's faith.

3. *The happy result.* "It was restored whole, like as the other," ver. 13. Circulation now was restored,—the living fluid flowed in their wonted channels,—the paralysis was removed, and the hand became whole,—so that in the power of use, and in its appearance, it became like as the other. Observe,

(1.) In this cure we see the gracious disposition of Christ to restore the man. And this the Saviour feels towards all the perishing children of men. He wills not the final ruin

of any. He desires the salvation of all men. His love embraces the wide world,—his atoning sacrifice included in its sufficiency and design every creature. In the gospel, Jesus expresses his love,—publishes it abroad, and invites all men to partake of it.

(2.) We see the miraculous power of Christ. By his word he healed him. He spake, and it was done. He thus possesses all power to deliver from sin and guilt, and to restore to the image and favour of God. This power extends to all sin and to all sinners. O yes,

“He is able—He is willing—
Doubt no more.”

(3.) We see the influence of faith. An apparent impossibility was enjoined. But to faith it was possible. The man had a warrant and he obeyed, and in the willingness to obey, he found the power. Faith has no inherent power,—it derives all its energy from the word it believes,—from the Saviour on whom it relies,—from the power on which it trusts. It is the creature of weakness laying hold on God’s strength, and then all things are possible.

(4.) We see an emblem of the converted sinner. Instantly restored, as the instantaneous work of conversion is effected. Perfectly restored as in conversion,—old things pass away, and behold all things become new. Now the man could use his hand and work for his bread, and now the converted soul can labour for the bread that is imperishable, and do the bidding of his God and Saviour. Learn,

(5.) That our inability is not a sufficient excuse for our sin. We are depraved, actually guilty,—true, and more, we cannot change our own hearts, or cleanse our own consciences. But can we hearken to Christ’s gospel? Can we be found in the way of his appointed means? Can we come to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness? Can we endeavour to do Christ’s bidding, and believe in his name?

If so, his power shall be exerted, and our restoration effected. To devise a remedy we cannot,—but to try Christ's gracious saving plan we are invited, and this being done, our cure is certain. We cannot meritoriously work out our own salvation,—but we can receive it as the free gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Then let the sinner feel his responsibility, and delay not to come to Christ to be made whole.

“Remember him who once applied,
 With trembling for relief—
 ‘Lord! I believe,’ with tears he cried,
 ‘O, help mine unbelief!’”

No. XIX.

RECOVERY OF JARIUS' DAUGHTER.

“While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead; but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and *so did* his disciples.”—*Matt.* ix. 18.

DEATH is no respecter of persons. He marks as his victims, the rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate, the young and the old. Our attention is now directed to the case of a young person of twelve years of age, who had been grievously afflicted, until at length, her sufferings terminated in death. Her father was a distinguished man among the Jews, a ruler of the synagogue, whose name was Jarius. This bereavement was the more distressing, as she was his only child. Doubtless, he had resorted to all the means within his power, but they were ineffectual, and at length he comes with intense anxiety, and makes his case known to Jesus. Let us take a survey,

I. OF THE MANNER OF HIS ADDRESS TO CHRIST. And,

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES CONNECTED WITH THE MIRACLE
JESUS WROUGHT.

I. THE MANNER OF HIS ADDRESS TO CHRIST. Observe,

1. *He paid him reverential homage.* “Behold, there came a certain ruler and worshipped him,” ver. 18. Here was a visible exhibition of his high and sacred regard for the Saviour, and a striking manifestation of his own humility. In all our approaches to Christ, how lowly we should be before Him. How reverentially we should bow before Him. This is ever essential—ever beautiful, and most interesting as evinced by the ruler on this occasion.

2. *He stated the nature of his grief.* “My daughter is even now dead.” He had left her probably in the agonies of dying, and he concluded that by this, the spirit had departed. His was a relative sorrow: and how vulnerable we are in all the relationships of life. How distressing this affliction—the loss of an only child. None left to whom the parental affection could be transferred. Removed too, just as she was rising into womanhood. Notice,

3. *He expressed extraordinary faith in the Saviour.* “But come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.” His faith had brought him to seek the gracious interposition of Christ. And now, though the case was absolutely hopeless—humanly speaking—he avers his belief that Christ could restore her, and that by laying his hand on her. This was a noble manifestation of faith in the power of the Saviour. It admitted Christ to be indeed the Messiah, and Son of the living God. It put the highest honour on his attributes and mission. We do not wonder therefore, that Christ bestowed high honour on such faith. Notice,

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES CONNECTED WITH THE MIRACLE
CHRIST WROUGHT.

1. *Christ immediately arose and went with Him.* Ver. 19. Here was faith acting immediately on the love and power of

Christ. He therefore delays not, but at once accompanies the distressed father to his house.

2. *He silences the mourners.* When he came to the ruler's house, and "saw the minstrels and the people making a great noise, he said unto them, 'Give place,'" &c. ver. 23 and 24. The minstrels were persons employed to play soft and melancholy music, on the decease of persons, and were accompanied in their plaintive strains by others, who gave themselves up to loud and violent expressions of sorrow and lamentation. He demands the cessation of the music and the mourning, and puts them forth from the room where the corpse was.

3. *He declares it to be but a temporary suspension of life.* He said to them, "The maid is not dead, but sleepeth," ver. 24. He did not mean that death had not really taken place—but that her decease should be no more than a temporary sleep. Death is often spoken of as sleep, and sleep is a very striking emblem of it. Those who heard this declaration, "laughed him to scorn," ver. 24. They were certain that she was actually dead, and doubtless despised all attempts for her resuscitation.

4. *He raises her by the hand, and behold she lives!* But when the people were put forth, he went in with his three disciples, Peter, James and John, "And took her by the hand, and the maid arose," ver. 25. Mark adds, that Christ, when he took her by the hand, said,—*Talitha cumi*: that is, "Damsel, I say unto thee, arise!" And thus by his almighty word, the damsel arose, and Jesus commanded that something should be given her to eat. Mark v. 41—43.

What a display of Divine power and glory was this! No wonder that it is recorded, "And the fame thereof went abroad into all that land," ver. 26.

Learn,

1. *The mutability of all earthly enjoyments.* Riches, honours, pleasures, friends, are all mutable. How important

then to avoid creature idolatry. They who have wives, or husbands, or children, should be as though they had none.

2. *The all-sufficiency of Christ.* For every trouble, and in every time of need.

3. *The power of faith.*

“Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries it shall be done !”

No. XX.

THE RESTORATION OF THE WIDOW'S SON.

“And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain ; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow ; and much people of the city was with her &c.”—*Luke* vii. 11, 17.

OUR subject introduces us to one of the most affecting scenes the evangelists record. Death is ever solemn, and to friends and relatives, a distressing event. But some bereavements are much more afflictive than others. The loss of the wife is described as the removal of the desire of our eyes. Hence, how sad and afflicted must Jacob have been, when his beloved Rachel was no more. The loss of an only child is a deep affliction, but even then, the parents may condole with each other ; and by mutual sympathy, lessen the grief of both. But our text introduces us to a widow who had lost her only son, and whom she was now following to the house appointed for all living. Happy for that daughter of sorrow Jesus was passing by—his compassion was excited—His wonder working arm was employed in giving back to her,

her only son. Observe in the miracle Jesus wrought on this occasion,

I. THAT IT WAS UNSOLICITED. On other occasions, sometimes the afflicted persons, at other times the friends of the afflicted, came and sought the merciful interposition of Jesus. But on this occasion the funeral train was moving towards the places of sepulchres, ver. 12. The widow was too absorbed in grief to notice anything which passed by ; and though Christ and his disciples drew near, his aid was not sought, his pity not implored.

II. THIS MIRACLE WAS PERFORMED IN THE MOST PUBLIC MANNER. All Christ's miracles were performed in the presence of competent witnesses. When he raised the ruler's daughter there were three of the disciples present. Often he wrought his miracles when multitudes surrounded him. So on this occasion, the funeral procession was just passing out of one of the public gates of the city. Here was the widowed mother, and also "much people of the city with her." ver. 12. Christ too was attended by his disciples, and much people were also with him, ver. 11. So that in the most public manner possible did Jesus display his Almighty power on this occasion.

III. THE MANNER OF ITS PERFORMANCE WAS MOST SIGNAL AND STRIKING.

1. *He touched the bier.* He stepped forth towards those who were bearing the corpse, and then stretched forth his wondrous hand, and touched the bier. No doubt some would recognize Him, and probably the bearers would be impressed with feelings of reverence and awe. Hence it is added, they "stood still."

2. *He proclaimed the life-giving word.* "And said, young man, I say unto thee, arise !" ver. 14. And immediately the spirit resumed its former habitation—the heart began to heave—the blood to circulate—the senses to resume their functions, and at Christ's omnific bidding he "sat up,

and began to speak," ver. 15. Here was unquestionable evidence of the reality of the miracle. Here was the dead attesting by a new given being, and by an audible voice, the glory of Him who was the resurrection and the life.

IV. IT WAS A MIRACLE OF TENDEREST COMPASSION. When Jesus first saw the funeral procession, he beheld the sorrow of the afflicted widow. He saw that the fountains of her soul were broken up. He beheld the tears which suffused her care-worn cheeks. He heard the deep plaints, and the distressing sighs of her burdened spirit. And it may be said of the gentle and affectionate Jesus, that his eye affected his heart. He resolves therefore to interpose his power in giving back to the widow her son from the regions of the dead. Hence before he exercised his infinite energy he said,

(1.) Weep not. Let thy tears cease to flow,—for thy adversity and mourning shall be turned into joy and gladness. When he said, Weep not!—it implied that the occasion of her grief should be taken away. How significant of Christ's great mission into our world. He came to dry up the tears of a sinful and afflicted world.

“Change then, O sad one! grief to exultation,
Worship and fall before Messiah's knee :
Strong was his arm, the bringer of salvation,
Strong was the word of God to succour thee.”

When he had wrought the miracle,

(2.) He delivered him to his mother, ver. 15. What a gift! How infinite the power, and how boundless the grace of the donor. No other gift would have met the weeping widow's need, and such a gift as this, none but the anointed Messiah could bestow. What the mother felt, or said, or did, is not revealed. What the young man uttered when he sat up, or what he spake to the Saviour, or to his mother.

or to the multitude, is not made known. The miracle, in all its grandeur, has been performed—the widow has received her son brought to life again—and now the curtain falls, and silently closes the august and wondrous scene. But,

V. THE EFFECTS ON THE MULTITUDE ARE DECLARED.

1. *A spirit of sacred awe pervaded their minds.* “There came a fear on all,” ver. 16. They felt they were in the presence of a great and glorious power. That he who could raise the dead must be an extraordinary person. One sent from God—one on whom the Spirit of God eminently rested. The two worlds had been very forcibly connected in the death of the young man, and disconnected in bringing him again him again to life.

2. *They glorified God.* And they did this by admitting the Messiahship of the Saviour. By confessing that God, according to the sayings of the prophets, had indeed visited the people. Would not the event remind them of the recorded miracles of Moses and Elijah, and would not they see in Christ, Him of whom Moses had written,—“A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me, him shall ye hear”? Yet we fear that the awe and the confession of Christ’s Messiahship were only temporary impressions. We fear that they did not retain the emotions excited, and that they did not adhere to Christ, or follow him as his disciples. Learn,

1. *How brittle and tender are the cords by which the relationships of life are bound together.* And often the young die before the old, the apparently strong and vigorous before the aged and enfeebled. Here was the corpse of the young man, and the aged widow following him to the tomb.

2. *What exalted views we should have of the Lord Jesus.* What majesty and power can be compared to his? And how evidently do these miracles testify to the divinity of his nature. He called not for the power from on high to do this mighty deed. No; it dwelt inherently in him. He did it

not in the name of the Father, but in his own name. He said, "I say unto thee arise."

3. *How it familiarizes to us the sublime doctrine of the resurrection.* Here we see the power efficient for the mighty work. He who brought this young man back by his word, will by his almighty fiat, raise again the slumbering millions at the last day.

4. *How it should teach us to cherish tenderness and compassion for the sorrowing.* Let the kind address of Jesus to the widow of Nain, be remembered and imitated. "Weep not." You may not have the power to remove the cause of sorrow as Jesus did, but labour to assuage the griefs of the afflicted and distressed. Labour to sympathize with the suffering, and be it your earnest desire to convey on every possible occasion, tender consolation to the bosom heaving with anguish and distress. "Weep with those that weep," and "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." How much misery and suffering might be dried up in our sad and dreary world, if all the disciples of Jesus would tread in the footsteps of the benevolent and merciful Saviour, "who went about doing good."

No. XXI.

THE DEATH OF LAZARUS, THE FRIEND OF
CHRIST.

"These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep."—*John xi. 11.*

FEW families have been more honourably distinguished than the family of Bethany. Two sisters and one bro-

ther constituted this godly household: the names of Martha and Mary will be handed down with holy fragrance to the latest posterity. Their brother was also one of the special objects of Christ's affection and esteem, v. 5. Even the most pious families are exposed to sickness, sorrow, and death. Disease invaded this domestic circle. The sickness waxed worse and worse, until death terminated his sufferings. Jesus had delayed his visit, though apprized of the condition of Lazarus, ver. 6, 7, &c. There are two main ideas in the text,

I. THE TRUE CHARACTER OF CHRIST'S DISCIPLES.
And,

II. A BEAUTIFUL, METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATION OF DEATH.

I. THE TRUE CHARACTER OF CHRIST'S DISCIPLES. They are his friends. Christ called Lazarus his friend. "Our friend." Now Christ thus denominates all his people. Abraham was called the friend of God.—John xv. 14, 15. Now in reference to this character, observe,

1. *That they were not always such.* Not such by birth nor education. Once afar off. Alienated. Without God. Enemies, &c.

2. *They became such by accepting the reconciliation offered in the Gospel.* Gospel reveals the Divine system of reconciliation. Publishes it. Urges it. We beseech you to be reconciled to God. By faith, the sinner is accepted into God's favour and family. That day the friendship commences.

3. *This friendship is connected with great immunities and blessings.* He reveals his will to such: xv. 15. He communes with such. He blesses, keeps, saves, &c. His promises and ordinances are all theirs. "All are yours," &c.

4. *This friendship with Christ will be made manifest.* We shall profess Christ. Entertain Christ. In our houses and hearts. Honour Christ. Obey him. Make his inte-

rests ours, &c. Prefer Christ above all things, &c. Extol and recommend him, &c.

5. *Friendship with Christ ever includes affection for his people.* Hence Christ said, Not my friend, but *ours*. A good man will love all good men. The spirit of goodness and love pervades the whole Christian church. Every believer is within one holy spiritual bond of grace, mercy, and peace. This is the great badge of christianity. "By this," &c.

II. THE TEXT CONTAINS A BEAUTIFUL, METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATION OF DEATH. "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." This metaphor was used at a very early period in reference to Moses, "Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers," Deut. xxxi. 16. Thus, too, Job. For now, saith he, "Shall I sleep in the dust, and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be," vii. 21. So Daniel speaks, that, "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake." So the apostle speaks of "Those whom sleep in Jesus, and whom God will bring with him." So Christ in his resurrection is said to be, "the first fruits of them that slept." Now observe,

1. *The striking resemblance between sleep and death.*—The eyes closed,—ears sealed,—senses suspended. The breathing, and the warmth of the body, only indicate between the one and the other. How truly it is the image of death.

2. *As sleep is a state of quiescence and repose.* The toil of the day is over,—fatigue past,—activity ceased. So all energy and labour, &c., end with respect to this world with the sleep of death.

3. *As sleep is identified with night.* They that sleep, sleep in the night, &c. and "I must work while it is called day," &c. To die, is to lie down in darkness. See Job x. 21, 22.

4. *As sound sleep is incompatible with suffering.* Weariness, pain, anguish, &c., are all forgotten in sleep. What a merciful cessation! So in death, all suffering of the body end. All care has left its distracting seat, &c.

5. *As sleep relates only to the repose of the body.* Mind still active. What scenes and events are familiar to us in the dreams and visions of the night season. Now so in death,—the body only is still and torpid. The mind lives, and thinks, and feels,—and who can describe the visions and scenes with which it becomes immediately conversant.

6. *As sleep is but a temporary suspension of the physical powers.* In a few hours the man awakes, and sees and hears, and resumes his activity. So death is not the annihilation of the body, much less of the soul. In the morning of the great day, the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall live. What a scene when countless millions shall be aroused by the trumpet's blast, and come forth at the bidding of their God and Judge. I just add, that death to the righteous,

(1.) Is a safe sleep. Their dust is precious with God.

(2.) Hopeful sleep. Lie down in hope, and that hope shall be realized to the full.

(3.) It is but a short sleep. Compared with eternity, even that of Abel will be but as a few moments,

(4.) *For this sleep serious preparation is necessary.* We should think, and reflect, prepare. Fear of God. Faith in Christ. Obedience to the Divine will, are the essential prerequisites.

Learn,

1. *The essential characteristics of true friendship with Christ.* Faith in Him, love to Him, and communion with Him.

2. *The connection between a holy life and a peaceful death.* The righteous sleep in Jesus. Death is the repose of their wearied bodies, and they retire to the grave with a blessed hope of a glorious resurrection.

3. *The grave is the prison of the unconverted.* There they are reserved until the judgment of the great day.

No. XXII.

CHRIST WEEPING AT THE GRAVE OF LAZARUS.

“Jesus wept.”—*John xi. 35.*

WE have previously contemplated Lazarus as the friend of Jesus, and have considered his decease under the striking emblem of sleep,—we are now to advance in the narrative, and mingle with his weeping sisters and friends. In verse 32, we have Jesus in the presence of the sisters, and listening to the sorrowful plaint of the affectionate Mary, who had said to him, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died,” ver. 32. He was then brought into the midst of the weeping circle, which when he beheld, it is said he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, where have ye laid him? They said unto him, “Lord, come and see.” He then proceeded with them to the grave of Lazarus, and it is written of him,—Jesus wept. A more pathetic sentence never was inscribed—so short—so simple—yet so comprehensive. A more natural inference could not have been drawn. When the Jews saw the tears of Jesus flowing, they said, “Behold how he loved him.”

I. LET US ASCERTAIN THE CHARACTER OF THE TEARS OF JESUS. And,

II. WHAT LESSONS WE ARE TAUGHT BY THEM.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE TEARS OF JESUS.

1. *He wept as a man.* We often insist on the divinity of the Lord Jesus. Cannot do so too extensively. It is one of the grand pillars of the Christian system. But it is equally important to remember his *manhood*,—made of a woman, &c. Truly a descendant of Adam and of the seed

of Abraham. Thus he had all our sympathies. God made the heart soft, that it might feel. Tender, that it might sympathize. And surely there is enough in the death of any ordinary friend to produce distress of spirit and a stream of tears. It is not weakness, but true manliness, to weep on just and fitting occasions.

2. *He wept as a friend.* He loved Lazarus. He was one of his disciples, &c. With him he had repeated fellowship and communion of soul. The highest, the richest, and the sweetest communion. Death had rent in twain the kindly bond. For love is the bond of perfectness—the cement of hearts—the one atmosphere of united souls. We would feel for a dear friend in *ordinary trouble*. In *ordinary* conflicts. In *ordinary* sufferings. But who shall describe the *agonies* of death. The *turbid* stream of Jordan. The *severe* conflict with the last *enemy*, &c. What a friend is Christ!—But he was also the friend of the two sisters. Their griefs therefore were his.

3. *He wept as the Saviour;—the Son of God.* He here beheld the power of sin—the degradation of man. The irreversible decree with respect even to the good and the pious. But, as the Saviour, he knew also of the infatuation of men in neglecting preparation for dying. The awful scenes which often immediately follow eternal death. The deep-rooted prejudice of the Jews who were about to witness the miracle, &c.

II. WHAT LESSONS ARE WE TAUGHT BY IT?

1. *That even the beloved saints of Christ must die.*

2. *That grief at the death of friends is both a right and sacred feeling.* Religion does not prohibit, it only moderates and sanctifies it. “Sorrow not as them without hope,” &c. Here is the greatest example, &c.

3. *That the death of saints is not overlooked by Jesus.* He is the Lord of providence. Lord both of the living and the dead. Whether we live, &c. He orders all things. He

doth all things well. He has the keys of death and the grave.

4. *That death itself is subject to our blessed Lord.* "I am the resurrection," &c. See him standing. Behold his countenance. Hear his voice. Watch its influence. How marvellous, &c. Think of the resurrection day. Time is expiring. Earth reeling. The heavens wrapped up as a scroll. Sun darkened. Moon turned to blood. Harken to the angels' blast. See the descending Saviour. Hear the omnific mandate. The earth bursts with life. Myriads—myriads rise at his bidding. It is the first resurrection. Their vile bodies are like to Christ's glorious bodies, &c. They ascend with him, and are so for ever with the Lord, &c.

5. *That Christ's presence can alone sanctify the bereavements of life.* In sickness, let us seek the especial presence and grace of Christ. Under bereavements, let us be solicitous to have the presence and grace of Christ. He alone can give strength to bear sorrow, to restrain its workings, and make it a blessing. He alone can be all to us when friends and kindred die. And he can be to us more than father or mother, or brother or sister—for to the true believer, "He is all, and in all." "The chiefest among ten thousand;" yea all our salvation, and all our desire.

No. XXIII.

RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.

“Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him, &c.”

John xi. 36—46.

WE have already witnessed the mighty power of Christ, in raising the ruler's daughter from the bed of death,—the widow's son from the bier as they were bearing him to the tomb,—and now we are called to behold the resurrection of Lazarus from the tomb, who had been dead four days. Jesus had borne his testimony to Lazarus as his friend, he had met with and comforted the bereaved and sorrowful sisters, and had announced the truth that he should rise again. He had wept with the mourners at his tomb, and now he stands ready to give the mandate which should recal him to life, and bring him back from the regions of the dead. Observe,

I. THE SCENE PRESENTED. He “cometh to the grave,” ver. 38. In that grave lay the earthly remains of Lazarus. How fit the description of one who likens it to a house, the house appointed for all living. How low and humble,—dug out of the earth. How small and circumscribed,—a few feet in its dimensions. How silent and dreary;—no sound of mirth or activity is heard proceeding from it. How appalling to flesh and blood. Nature could not court it;—who would wish to exchange the splendid sitting-room, or even the social hearth for it? Yet how numerous and how densely populated! The earth may be likened to one great graveyard,—one world of sepulchres. It is a house whose foundations rest on the sin of man,—rebellion dug

out its basis, and but for sin, earth would have been as sepulchreless as heaven. Here we behold the ravages of transgression, and the degradation and ruin of our nature. Yet thanks be to God, it is not an eternal prison, for Jesus stands at its margin to raise to life its slumbering tenant. Notice,

II. THE DIRECTIONS GIVEN. (1.) He ordered the removal of the stone from the mouth of the tomb. Martha's doubts seemed now to arise, for she concluded by that period that the body had become putrescent. To this Jesus replied, that if she would believe, as he had already said, she should see the glory of God, ver. 40. The miracles of the Redeemer reflected the Divine glory. They were the demonstrations of the power and goodness of Jehovah. And they attested the Divine mission of the Lord Jesus. The stone was now removed—then,

(2.) Jesus held devotional communion with his Father. With eyes lifted up towards heaven, he said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me: and I knew that thou hearest me always," &c. ver. 41, 42. Here the oneness of the Son with the Father's mind is beautifully implied. As they were one in nature, so of necessity in purpose and design. Jesus ever prayed in accordance with the will of his Father, and his Father ever delighted to hear and grant his requests. He thus honoured the Father by confidential acknowledgment, and holy thanksgiving. Observe,

III. THE POWER HE EXERTED. Having thus communed with God, "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus come forth!" Observe, though he had prayed to the Father, he does not raise Lazarus in the Father's name, but by his own almighty command. His voice pierced the caverns of the dead, extended to the spirit of the deceased, and imparted life to the slumbering remains of Lazarus. Hence, immediately, "He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about

with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go," ver. 44. No wonder that the multitude should have been panic-struck by the scene, and that Lazarus should have been left to struggle with his funeral apparel. Let it be remembered, that this was a miracle of indisputable reality. Collusion, or deception, was out of the question. It was effected by the word of Christ. It was one of the Redeemer's most extraordinary miracles,—one of his most stupendous doings on earth. And yet while it produced faith in some who beheld it, (ver. 45,) yet the chief priests and the pharisees were more established in their prejudice and envy of Christ, and sought more diligently after this how they might take him and put him to death. How clear that no evidence can meet the exigencies of the mind, spell-bound by prejudice and the love of sin,

Learn,



1. *The glory and dominion of Christ.* How true that He hath the keys of hades and death. That He can open, and no man can shut. That His power and authority extend to all beings and to all worlds. He is Lord of all.

2. *Here we have an emblematical representation of the resurrection of the soul dead in sin.* He quickens by his power and word, those who are dead in trespasses and sins.

3. *This gives us a miniature view of the final resurrection.* That voice which awoke Lazarus, shall wake the slumbering multitudes at the last day. The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and live.

No. XXIV.

THE TEN LEPERS.

“And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed ? but where *are* the nine ?”—*Luke xvii. 17.*

THE human body is exposed to a number of fearful maladies. Sin has sown its seeds of decay and sorrow in every part of the system, and these have produced a harvest of painful and distressing maladies. During the Saviour's sojourn on earth, he exercised his almighty and gracious influence in allaying and restoring from the various ills that flesh is heir to. He went about doing good both to the bodies and souls of men. He healed all manner of diseases, and even brought back again the spirits of the departed, and resuscitated the lifeless clay already committed to the grave. Our text refers to one of his stupendous miracles, and is fraught with varied and important instruction. Notice,

I. THE REAL CONDITION OF THE PERSONS REFERRED TO.

II. THEIR APPLICATION TO CHRIST.

III. THE CURE WROUGHT. And,

IV. THE THANKS OF THE SAMARITAN AND THE INGRATITUDE OF THE NINE.

I. THE ORIGINAL CONDITION OF THE PERSONS REFERRED TO. They were lepers. Leprosy was an exceedingly distressing disease. It was painful and disgusting to the individual, and contagious and loathsome to others. It was often inflicted as a punishment upon heinous transgressors. Such were incurable by the power of man. Were excluded from society, and not allowed to enter the courts of the Lord's

house. What a concentrated calamity. What a condition of hopelessness and sorrow. Yet on this occasion there were ten of such persons associating together. Outcasts from society, unapproachable by friends, and the terror of all who might even behold them afar off. In these lepers, we see exhibited the true condition of sinners. Sin is to the soul, all, and more than all, that leprosy is to the body. It defiles, embitters, defies human aid to eradicate. It separates from the society of the holy, and terminates in the horrors of a guilty death. Worse than leprosy, it ends not with the grave,—but exposes its victims to the everlasting misery of the unending death.

II. THEIR APPLICATION TO CHRIST.

1. *Observe the distance they kept from his person.* “Who stood afar off,” ver. 12. That they might not disgust him by the offensiveness of their disease, and according to law, not being allowed to come near any clean person.

2. *The earnestness of their prayer.* “Have mercy on us.” Their supplication was short, but expressive and fervent. It was the real sense of their degradation and misery, that made them so anxious for the interposition of the Redeemer.

3. *The unanimity of their application.* Alike diseased, miserable, so they agree in their suit, and they are one in their prayer.

4. *The reverence and faith they evinced.* “Jesus,” *i. e.*, Saviour—“Master,” one having authority. Authority from God. The Jews denied this, and treated his claims with disbelief and scorn. These poor lepers acknowledged his character both as Son and Lord. Without one ray of believing hope, they had not prayed. Doubtless they had heard of the miracles of Christ, and therefore some measure of faith had come by their hearing, and this they embodied in their cry, “Jesus—Master,” &c.

III. THE CURE WROUGHT.

1. *It was in connection with obedience to his will.* He did not instantaneously do it. He commanded them to go to the priests, &c. Now here two points were involved. *Faith* exercised in him. They had called him Jesus. Now he tests their belief of his authority. He *said, go, &c.* They had called him Master. He now tests their submission, &c. As cured lepers only were to go to the priests, it is evident that these were to expect on their arrival there, that they would be free from their malady. The end of this arrangement might be threefold.

(1.) For their own sake. That the priests might attest their real restoration, and thus enable them to return to their friends and society.

(2.) For the priests' sake. That they might see the almighty power of Christ, and not remain in unbelief. And to render them excuseless if they rejected his Messiahship.

(3.) For his own sake. That his credentials, as the anointed and sent of God, might be read and known of all.

2. *The cure itself.* As they went, they were healed. The weakness arising from it gave way to strength. The impurity to cleanness. Internally made sound, externally their flesh would be as that of a little child. It was a radical, universal, and complete cure. A cure resulting from the gracious and divine power of the Son of God.
Cons

IV. THE THANKS RENDERED BY THE SAMARITAN, AND THE INGRATITUDE OF THE NINE. Observe,

1. *The Samaritan.* Belonging to a class despised by the Jews,—of supposed inferior knowledge, and feelings. One of a degraded class. Yet when he found himself healed, he immediately returned to Christ, and gave the most lively evidences of joyful exultation, ver. 15, 16. His thanks were ardent, humble, and sincere. How beautiful was the scene. Notice,

2. *The nine.* These were Jews. But having obtained

the boon, they forgot the donor. Selfishness excluded the best feelings from their souls, and there is a manifest severe reproof, &c., included in the 18th verse.

3. *Observe the commendation of the one.* He said to him, "Arise, go thy way," &c. No doubt but this man was spiritually, as well as physically, healed. Christ's address *exalted* him. *Arise*, &c. He that humbleth himself, &c. His *faith* is *eulogized*. "Thy faith," &c. Faith had taken hold of Christ's free and rich virtue, and thus he was made whole. Christ's favour evidently accompanies him. "Go thy way," &c.

Learn,

1. *The willingness and power of Christ to heal.* He is still the same, &c. He desires, he delights to heal, &c.

2. *The application to be made.* It must be personal, earnest, and believing.

3. *The return he demands of those he saves.* Gratitude,—that God might be glorified. He thus has a new right to us, "Ye are not your own," &c.

4. *The commonness of ingratitude.* Children are often so to parents. Servants to masters. The relieved towards their benefactors. How vile and odious. But have not we all been so to God? How we have forgotten his benefits, &c. *Vows* broken. That deliverance. That restoration to health, &c. Where are the nine? That *sinner* said he would become serious if recovered,—but where is he? That nominal Christian devout,—but where is he? That believer more devoted, but where is he? &c. O Lord, enter not into judgment, &c.

XXV.

THE HEALING OF MALCHUS'S EAR.

“And, behold, one of them who was with Jesus stretched out *his* hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword,” &c.—*Matt.* xxvi. 51—54.

THE ministry of Jesus began with the manifestation of his miraculous power. Miracles also were constantly confirming the doctrines he taught. And his labours on earth, and his wondrous works, only ended together. Our subject introduces us to Christ subsequently to the agony which he endured in the garden. He had now by communion with his Father obtained the victory over that fear which so oppressed him. He had intimated to his disciples that the hour of his suffering was at hand, when, lo! Judas with a great multitude, and the chief priests and elders of the people, came with swords and staves to arrest him. The base and faithless kiss having been given, Jesus said unto him, “Friend, wherefore art thou come?” Then came they and laid their hands on Jesus and took him, ver. 48—50. Then it was that Peter, under the influence of excitement, stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the High Priest and cut off his ear, &c. Let us contemplate the scene before us, and in doing so observe,

I. WE HAVE A STRIKING INSTANCE OF UNHALLOWED ZEAL IN A GOOD CAUSE. Behold the divine and lowly Jesus,—the heavenly teacher,—the true and tender friend of humanity in the hands of violent and unprincipled men. We

marvel not that his disciples should burn with indignation at the rudeness manifested towards him. We would admire the soul that deeply felt and tenderly sympathized with the friend of sinners. Jesus had done nothing amiss. His was the cause of righteousness, and purity, and love. Peter therefore was connected with, and acting for, that which was equitable and right. But his errors were manifold.

1. *Jesus knew best what to do, and not Peter.* He was therefore impetuous and rash. He neither sought advice of his Master, nor of his brethren. "Do nothing rashly," is an admonition worthy of the regard of all men. One very wisely advises, "When ye know not what to do, do not then ye know not what." The cause of religion was never really served by precipitancy and rashness.

2. *Peter's spirit was unsuited to the occasion.* Christ had once said to his disciples, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." How fully did Peter realize this on this occasion. Had Peter forgotten the intimations that Christ had so frequently given of what should come to pass? Had not the Saviour just reiterated that the Son of man should be betrayed, and that the very hour was at hand? ver. 43. Had he not been one of the witnesses of the Saviour's agonizing devotion in the garden? How discordant was the rash and violent spirit of Peter, with the sacred solemnities of the night the Redeemer had spent in the garden. Peter's mind was evidently under the power of carnal and earthly influences.

3. *His weapon was inappropriate to the cause in which he had embarked.* Had he been the servant of an earthly prince or worldly leader, he might have borne an instrument of worldly combat. But Christ's kingdom was spiritual, heavenly, peaceable. He came to *instruct*, but the sword could not aid in that. He came to *convince*, but an earthly sword could not aid in that. He came to *save and bless*, but the sword could help in neither. He came not to *destroy*, and

therefore the sword could be of no avail. Persuasion, conversion, consolation, were not within the province of the sword.

4. *His act was in direct opposition to the spirit and life of Jesus.* It was violent and cruel. It was an act which imperilled the life of man. All Christ's acts were good and gracious, and kind. He never cursed, or injured, or destroyed. He pitied, and saved, and blessed those to whom he came. He came not to condemn and kill, but to save and make alive. How opposite the spirit and act of the disciple to those of the Saviour.

II. WE HAVE THE MERCIFUL INTERPOSITION OF JESUS ON BEHALF OF ONE OF HIS ENEMIES. The sword has smitten off the ear of Malchus,—had not the restraining grace of Christ been at hand, it would probably have been his head, and thus murder and bloodshed would have characterized the ministry of Jesus. Christ, however,

1. *Endeavours to allay the irritation which this act was calculated to excite.* Hence he says to Malchus and those round him, "Suffer ye thus far," Luke xxii. 51. Don't retaliate on my over-heated servant. Don't imagine we intend resistance even to your illegal violence.

2. *He reproves and admonishes Peter.* "Put up again thy sword." My cause requires not the use of carnal weapons. They indeed may injure it, but they cannot promote it. And observe, "they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword," ver. 52. Now by this, Christ might signify that men who used the sword would be met with the same weapons, and that the strongest would gain the mastery. And therefore how foolish for Peter to resist an armed multitude. Or, that all who trusted in the sword for defence and safety, should be abandoned by the providence of God, and the sword should prove their ruin. Or, that those who dared to invade God's prerogative in taking away human life, should, in his righteous retributive providence, suffer in like

manner. Or, this might be an indirect prediction of the end of Peter, who afterwards was put to a violent death for adherence to the cause of his Master. It is clear that the sword is forbidden in the propagation or defence of the religion of Jesus. And does not the sword here become the emblem of all that is carnal and earthly?—

(1.) All force or coercion.

(2.) All fines and disabilities.

(3.) All secular interference.

(4.) All bigotry, rancour, and sectarianism. All these are unworthy of Christ's cause, and cannot possibly extend his religion. The tongue, the spirit, the temper of religionists, are often of the same unhallowed kind as Peter's sword.

3. *He affirms his perfect ability to obtain all the aid his exigencies require.* "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray," &c., v. 53. Here he shows that he could have obtained at once by one single request of the Father, twelve legions of angels for his defence and service. In past ages, angels had served the people of God. They encamp constantly around the righteous. They are all ministering spirits, &c. But the empire of the Redeemer was to be based on Divine truth, and the truth itself in the hands of Jesus, was destined to accomplish all his purposes.

4. *He then heals the ear of the suffering Malchus.* He remedies the evils of Peter's rashness, and kindly interferes to bless one of his suffering enemies. Here was Divine magnanimity,—heavenly generosity,—tenderest goodness. He acts not with, but against the sword, and thus proves himself the Prince of Peace. Thus he gives a last display of his miraculous power in the midst of his disciples and enemies, and blesses with his healing influence one who had been sent to arrest him.

Learn,

1. *The spirituality of Christ's religion.* A heavenly kingdom set up in the heart of man. Not a wordly hier-

archy. Not a secular establishment. Not a carnal institution.

2. *The true spirit in which it should be promoted.* In the spirit of its divine Lord and Founder. In the spirit of enlightened truth. In the spirit of universal love. In the spirit of calm self-denial. In the spirit of long-suffering and meekness. We often best promote it by *passive suffering*. Earthly resistance is incompatible with its true genius. See the early disciples,—they promoted it by suffering. So the Reformers, Puritans, &c. This requires much more grace than does the spirit of aggressive action. Our subject reads a startling lesson,

3. *To persecutors.* How many of the wise and good have erred in fleeing to the sword,—but how fearfully has it returned upon *themselves*. All history exemplifies this. Beware of the spirit, that you may avoid the doom.

No. XXVI.

THE MIRACLES ACCOMPANYING THE CRUCIFIXION.

“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me, &c.”—*Matt.* xxvii. 45—51.

THE Redeemer had given ample evidence by his wondrous deeds, of the truth of his Messiahship. His ministry had been one continued scene of miracles. The work which had been given him to do, was now accomplished, and the time of his departure to the Father had arrived. Of his sufferings and death he had often spoken, and now he was expiring in un-

utterable agonies on the cross ; but to his Messiahship a series of miracles bore testimony in his dying hour. These are detailed by the sacred evangelists, and are left us for our instruction, and the confirmation of our faith and hope in Him. The evangelist directs our attention,

I. TO THE SUPERNATURAL DARKNESS. "Now from the sixth hour to the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land," ver. 45. That is, from twelve to three o'clock. It is clear that this was not the result of an eclipse of the sun, for it was at the time of the Jewish passover, when the moon was at full. It is obvious too, that this darkness was something more than the sky being overcast ; it was evidently dense palpable darkness. Here then was the intervention of the finger of God. This darkness,

1. *Was the fulfilment of prophecy.* Compare Joel ii. 30—32 ; and Acts ii, 16, &c.

2. *It symbolized the darkness of the Jewish people, and the heinousness of their sin in putting to death the Son of God.* They had scorned God's servants, and persecuted his prophets ; but they said in reference to the Son, "This is the heir, let us kill him." It was the filling up of the measure of their nation's iniquity.

3. *It seemed to indicate the termination of the Mosaic dispensation.* That the day of types and shadows, and ceremonies was now ended, and that these were all concluded by the darkness which attended the crucifixion of the Son of God. It was the interval between the times of Moses and the prophets, and those of Christ and the gospel era.

4. *It ratified the divinity of the Messiah's mission and character.* The darkness in Egypt was one of the signs of the divinity of Moses' commission to Pharaoh. And now in the dense and universal darkness which prevailed, was beheld an astounding confirmation of the Messiahship of Jesus,—that Great prophet—of whom Moses was but a type. Dr. Young thus describes the scene :—

"The sun beheld it—no, the shocking scene
 Drove back his chariot; Midnight veiled his face;
 Not such as this, not such as nature makes:
 A midnight, nature shuddered to behold;
 A midnight new! A dread eclipse
 (Without opposing spheres) from her
 Creator's frown!
 Sun, didst thou fly thy maker's pain? or start
 At that enormous load of human guilt,
 Which bow'd his blessed head, overwhelmed his cross,
 Made groan the centre—bursts earth's marble womb
 With pangs, strange pangs! delivered of her dead!
 Hell howl'd; and heaven that hour let fall a tear.
 Heaven wept, that man might smile!
 Heaven bled, that man might never die."

II. THERE WAS THE RENDING OF THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE. "And, behold the veil of the temple was rent in twain," &c. ver. 51.

There were two veils in the temple. One of them separated the holy place from the outer court. The other separated between the holy place, and the holiest of all. It was doubtless the latter which was now rent from the top to the bottom. This veil was of tapestry of extraordinary dimensions and thickness, and its instantaneous severance was beyond the power of ordinary means. It is likely this took place just at the time that the Great High Priest was ministering before the Lord.

(1.) This veil typified the body of the Redeemer, which enclosed the divinity—the fulness of the Godhead. Now that body was expiring, and that which shadowed it forth was now torn, and ceased to possess its typical position. See Col. i. 20—22. Heb. ix. 7—8.

(2.) It indicated also the abrogation of the Jewish ritual. The holiest of all was now no longer concealed. Its ends

and purposes being consummated, and a new and better dispensation having been brought in.

(3.) It also was expressive of the removal of the wall of partition which had separated between the Jews, and the Gentile nations. An economy was now instituted which was to bless all men, irrespective of nation or language. Jesus was now expiring without the gate, as the great sacrifice for sin,—the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

This miracle was wrought in the presence of the highest Jewish authorities, and in the very midst of their sacred place. We now have to contemplate,

III. THE EARTHQUAKE AND THE RENDING OF THE ROCKS. “And the earth did quake and the rocks were rent.” A similar scene occurred at the giving of the law, Exodus xix. 18. Psalm xviii. 7—13. It seems also that the prophet Haggai had referred to it in one of his sublime predictions, ii. 6, 7—21. And the apostle Paul expressly alludes to it, Heb. xii. 26, 27. This was a public attestation of the wicked deed the Jews were perpetrating, and in connexion with the rent veil seemed to refer to the establishment of a new dispensation. Did it not also rebuke the stout hearted obstinacy of the Jews who had rejected, and were now imbruing their hands in the blood of the Messiah, the true Son of God? And was it not also the last, with the exception of his own resurrection, or concluding miracle, which should certify of Christ during his personal mission in our world? It is not certain whether the dead who arose did so now, or at his resurrection; but the latter seems to be the more probable, and therefore they were rather witnesses of his inherent life and immortality, than signs at his death on the cross. How striking and appropriate the exclamation of the astonished centurion, who said, “Truly this was the Son of God.” The impression of the whole scene, which was extraordinary and supernatural, wrought conviction on his mind, and led to his pious and reasonable confession.

Learn,

1. *That in the death of Jesus, we have a deep and sacred interest.* He was apprehended, tried, condemned, and put to an open shame and ignominious death for our sins. While wondering at the astounding phenomenon, never forget that he loved you, and gave himself for you.

2. *That continued sin and unbelief is the putting Christ to death again, so far as we can do it.* It is pouring contempt on Jesus, and all the striking attestations God gave of his divinity and glory.

3. *These should be the results in the whole of us:—Admiration of the person and character of Christ. Adoring confidence and love. And a decided public confession of Him before men.*

SKETCHES

ON

MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS.

THE PROUD ABASED AND THE LOWLY EXALTED.

“And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done *it*.”—*Ezek.* xvii. 24.

THE paragraph of which the text is the conclusion, evidently refers to the setting up of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The metaphors employed are very striking and beautiful. It has been realized in part by the coming of the Gospel reign, but its full accomplishment is reserved for that period when the Saviour's name shall be great from the rising, &c. When all nations shall be blessed in him, and all people shall call him blessed, &c. In doing this, God is represented in our text as acting by a method different to that of worldly policy. Worldly men select and exalt the great and the flourishing, and despise the small and the weak. God, on the other hand, acts the very reverse, &c. We shall consider the text as exemplified,

I. IN THE HISTORY OF HIS PROVIDENCE. Look at the Antedeluvians and Noah. They were the high and green trees,—Noah and family, the low and the dry. No doubt

the objects of derision and scorn. A whole world's principles and conduct against them. Yet how fearfully did God fulfil the spirit of the text in the doom of the old world, and in the preservation of Noah, &c.

(2.) There was *Pharaoh* and the *Israelites*. Pharaoh, the high green tree. Majesty, dignity, power, riches, were his. Degradation, toil, oppression, the lot of the Israelites. Their thralldom seemed irrevocably fixed. No dawning of hope, &c. But God steps forth, and how he brought down the high tree, &c. Let the rolling waters of the Red Sea expound the passage to all future generations.

(3.) There was *Goliath* and *David*. One a prodigy of Herculean size and strength. Clad in his apparently invincible armour. A man of war, &c. The other a youth of pastoral habits, whose life had been spent in tending his father's flock on the mountains of Israel. Harken to the challenge. See the combat, and how Jehovah teaches the stripling's hands to war, &c.

(4.) There was *Haman* and *Mordecai*. Haman, the highest tree of all the princes of the Persian king. He was to have the homage of the people, and that by the express mandate of the king. Mordecai was the low tree, a private citizen, a Jew of no power or authority. These trees came in collision,—who can doubt the result? Surely the high tree shall overcome, and the low tree be destroyed. The realization seems at hand,—but, mark, *Haman* is executed, and ends his days in infamy,—*Mordecai* is raised next in power and authority to the king. Let these instances suffice to show how in the history of Divine providence, God has brought down the high tree, &c.

II. WE SEE IT IN THE HISTORY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. A Messiah had been promised from the earliest period of time. He had been held up in prophecy, types, &c. The Jews had expected him for ages. At the time of the advent of Christ, their expectation was most intense and

general. But observe, the Jews expected the high green tree. They expected earthly magnificence. They expected worldly power and authority. They expected an earthly kingdom. But Christ fulfilled the sayings of the prophets. Is. liii. 1, &c. In all things he was the opposite of their desires, &c. Hence they killed him. Yet Christ, the low tree, &c., did God exalt, &c. He hath made him to flourish, &c. His name shall endure as long as the sun, &c.

III. WE SEE IT IN THE TRIUMPHS OF THE APOSTOLIC LABOURS. The great founders of Christ's kingdom go forth to set up christianity. Look at the persons of the apostles,—plain, illiterate, poor men. Not the high green tree. Not learned, affluent, or influential. Harken to their message. What is it? Christ crucified. Not a religion of metaphysical subtleties. Not elaborate doctrines or profound dogmas of philosophy. Not a splendid system of pompous ceremony. But the lowly doctrines of the cross. Humility, self-denial, spirituality, &c. And what is the result? *The high tree* of paganism is brought down. *The green tree* of Judaism is dried up. *The low tree* of christianity is exalted, and flourishes, and blesses every known civilized land, &c. How forcibly is this described.—1 Cor. i. 21—29. Look at its illustration,

IV. IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE HAUGHTY, AND OF THE PENITENTIAL SINNER.

The man of proud heart, exalted self-esteem. He despises God's authority. Full of self-sufficiency,—perhaps of self-righteousness. He may be the very realization of the pharisees of old. See him lifting himself up as the high tree, boasting of himself as the green tree. I thank thee, O God, &c.

See the low tree of humble penitency. The poor publican self-convicted, self-abhorred. He is the dry tree, nothing to trust in, or to plead. He scarcely lifts up his eyes,—he smites on his breast, and exclaims, God be mer-

ciful, &c. Mark the result. God rejects the high tree,—he despises his work,—he brings him low. He beholds with approbation the low tree, &c. He goes down to his house justified.

V. LOOK AT IT IN THE LIVES OF THE HIGH MINDED AND OF THE LOWLY CHRISTIAN.

Pride and self-sufficiency are the great temptations of the human heart. *To be something. To do something. To be thought something.* To exalt ourselves. How prone we are to this. Well, what is the result? God knows it will ruin us, if not eradicated. We must be brought low in *mercy* or *judgment*. He blights the worldly prospects. He reverses the dazzling scene. He sends repeated disappointments. Troops of crosses and troubles. Perhaps keen bereavements. And thus brings down the *high tree*, dries up the green tree, &c. If *these fail*, then he permits such to make shipwreck of faith, &c. Eternal judgment overwhelms them.

But behold the *low tree*, the dry tree. The lowly Christian says, "I am nothing." He lives by faith on the Son of God, &c. He abases himself, &c. He glories in the cross, &c. He makes mention of Christ's righteousness, &c. He dwells in the dust. God *exalts*, blesses, makes fruitful, &c., lifts them up for ever.

APPLICATION.

1. *Learn the evil of self-exaltation.* Avoid it. Watch against it. Pray against it.

2. *Be clothed with humility.* What peace, safety, and honour are here.

3. *God must have all the glory.* See the text: also Daniel iv. 34.

PAUL'S APOSTOLIC EXPERIENCE.

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called *me* by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.”—*Gal.* i. 15—16.

THE apostle had been greatly honored, by the success of his ministry, in the region of Galatia. To him his converts were devotedly attached. So ardent was their affection, that they would have plucked out their eyes to have served him. At length however, false teachers crept in among them, and proclaimed an adulterated gospel. They contended for the essentiality of circumcision, and an observance of the Jewish ritual. To give great weight to their teaching, they insinuated that Paul was not a rightly constituted apostle—not fully authorized to preach the gospel of Christ Jesus. The apostle therefore, had to vindicate his claim to the ministry, and the divinity of his apostolical call. In our text he does this, by referring both to his conversion, and his call to the ministerial work. Let us then notice,

His declaration concerning his conversion.

His divine commission to preach the Gospel; and

The course of conduct which he adopted. Notice then,

I. HIS DECLARATION CONCERNING HIS CONVERSION.

Here he specifies three things,

1. *His separation from his mother’s womb.* Now by this he might refer to his natural birth,—recognize the God of his life as the author of his salvation. That he who formed and gave him being, regenerated him and gave him the new life, and the divine nature. But I rather judge that he refers to his separation from the Jewish church. He was in the

highest degree a Jew. See Philip. iii. 4, &c. To this church he was ardently attached, even as a filial son to his mother; but it pleased God to separate, &c., at a time when he was zealously laboring for its interests, &c. How striking—how entire that separation!

2. *God called him by his grace.* That call was miraculous. When he was set against Christ and against the gospel. When he was exceeding mad, &c. A savage destroyer, &c. How gracious the interference of the Redeemer. How he expostulates—Saul, Saul! &c. How he softens his heart, &c. How he directs him where to go for instruction, &c. This was a call from enmity to love. From bondage to liberty. From death to life, &c. From hell to heaven.

3. *God revealed his son in him.* Now to reveal, is to make manifest what was previously hidden. The rising sun reveals the wonders of nature. Now in Paul's case there was a revelation of Christ to him. Christ appeared in the overwhelming light of heaven, &c. He says, "Christ was also seen by him as one born," &c. Now the gospel reveals Christ to us. But Christ was revealed in him. Revealed to the eyes of his understanding,—to his heart. His soul beheld him and received him. Now this is evangelical conversion,—when Christ is revealed in the heart, the hope of glory. He that thus seeth the Son hath eternal life. I just add, that when Christ is revealed in us, he will also be revealed *by us*. We shall shew forth Christ. We shall exhibit the resemblance of our spirits to his. Living epistles—read and known, &c. Consider,

II. HIS DIVINE COMMISSION TO PREACH THE GOSPEL. "That I might preach him among the heathen." Now here you have,

1. *His special work.* "To preach." That is, to publish and proclaim. To announce, and declare, and to offer. He had many other duties—to counsel, to visit, to write; but his great work was to preach. Wherever he went. Where-

ever providence placed him. From the time of his conversion to his death, he was to preach.

2. *His great theme.* To preach Christ. To preach Christ is to preach the gospel; for it is the gospel of Christ. And all preaching that is evangelical and saving, is preaching Christ. All doctrines—all blessings—all privileges—all duties—all ordinances—all graces must be preached in close and indissoluble connexion with Christ. All that relates to Christ. Christ to all. Christ always. Christ all and in all. How faithfully Paul obeyed his commission. "I am determined," &c. "We preach Christ," &c. "We preach not," &c. "God forbid," &c. "Yea, doubtless," &c.

3. *The appointed sphere of his ministry.* "Among the heathen." He was emphatically the apostle of the Gentiles, as Peter was of the Jews. Not indeed exclusively, but generally: "Unto me who am less," &c. See Acts ix. 15. So that his commission extended to all the Gentile nations of the earth. Hence he appeared as the angel flying, &c. We meet with him in almost every nation and clime of the then known world, &c. It is said that these visited the distant isles of the sea, and on our shores lifted up the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. This leads us,

III. TO THE COURSE OF CONDUCT WHICH HE ADOPTED.
"Immediately I conferred not," &c.

1. *He did not confer with his Jewish friends.* If so, they would have labored to dissuade him, &c. But he surrendered them all; and though honored and loved by them he forsook them for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. *He did not confer with the other apostles of Christ.* Ver. 17. He states this, that he might shew he did not receive his commission from men, however high in office, &c. Had he gone to them they would have probably feared, or reasoned on the propriety of a period of probation, that the Christians might have confidence in his character and conversion.

3. *He did not confer with the feelings of his own nature.* His nature would have resisted the work, and fled from it. His nature would have said *ease*,—his call was to *toil*; honor—his call was to reproach; wealth—his call was to poverty; earthly enjoyment;—his call was to suffer, and even to death; self—his call was to moral crucifixion, and for Christ to be all and in all. Observe,

4. *The promptitude of his conduct.* “Immediately.” With prompt decision. At once, and with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, he went forth, &c.

APPLICATION.

1. *How much to adore in the Saviour.* His condescension and grace to Saul. Wherefore?—for his own sake, and for the sake of the church and the world. See 1 Tim. i.—16.

2. *How much to imitate in the spirit and conduct of the apostle.* In reference to his own calling to love and serve Jesus—he says, “I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” He surrendered—he yielded—he cried for mercy. Have you all thus obeyed the call? &c. He did Christ’s work cheerfully. Have you followed the course that divine providence has marked out? &c. Give Christ your talents, influence, time, &c. Like Paul, do not confer with flesh and blood;—with those opposed to Christ, and true inward religion. Urge this upon the young. Those who are half-decided, &c. O, be prompt, and earnest, and devoted to Jesus.

3. *This revelation of Christ in us is essential to salvation.* Nothing will do instead. “We must be born again.” “Except a man be converted,” &c.

ALL CHRISTIANS SHOULD WORK FOR GOD.

“And to every man his work.”—*Mark* xiii, 34.

THIS portion of Divine truth is equally applicable to us with those to whom it was originally addressed. And it is of the first importance that we should recognize it, feel it, and live and act under its responsibility.

In religion there is much to *learn*:—the great mystery of godliness is spread before us, and we should labour to increase daily in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul said, “Yea, doubtless,” &c.

In religion there is much to *enjoy*. Its blessings are rich and overflowing. Hitherto ye have asked nothing, &c. Ask and receive, &c.

In religion there is much to *endure*,—afflictions, temptations, distresses, &c. Through much tribulation, &c.

In religion there is much to *be done*. It is eminently a practical thing. Obedience is the great evidence of true discipleship. “If ye know, &c., happy are ye if *ye do them*.” Now this is the principle.

I. EVERY MAN HAS A WORK ASSIGNED HIM OF GOD.

There is the work of *repentance* and *faith*.

There is the work of *personal* religion. “Work out your own salvation.” Give diligence, &c. “Fervent in spirit,” &c.

There is the work of *relative* piety,—discharging those religious duties in our various stations. Parents,—children,—masters,—servants. But in addition to these there is the work,

Of spiritual *influence*, or our *generations’ work*.

(1.) To some, the work of the *ministry*. To preach and teach Jesus Christ. To warn, &c. To build up the church, &c. To make full proof of our ministry. A great, solemn, arduous, and momentous work.

(2.) To others, the work of the deaconship. To serve the tables in the Lord's house. The minister's table. The tables of the poor. The Lord's table.

(3.) To all, works of Christian *usefulness*. How large the sphere. How various the modes of Christian activity. How numerous the claims. How affecting the appeals. What room for the devotion of talents—wealth—influence—knowledge, &c.

II. IT SHOULD BE THE EARNEST DESIRE OF THE CHRISTIAN TO KNOW HIS ESPECIAL WORK. To every man *his* work. That to which he is *qualified*. That to which *he is appointed*. That for which *he is responsible*. This may be ascertained,

(1.) By reflection. As to the desires of the soul—impressions, &c.

(2.) By seeking the counsel of friends.

(3.) By asking direction from the Lord. "If any man," &c. "Lord, what wouldst thou have?" &c. "Commit thy way," &c.

III. WHEN THE WORK IS ASCERTAINED, WE SHOULD ENTER ON THE DISCHARGE OF ITS DUTIES.

1. *We should do this instantly*. Not confer with flesh and blood. Not consult feelings, or the opinions of others. We should say, "Lord, here am I." "Speak, Lord," &c.

2. *We should do it cheerfully*. With a willing mind and ready spirit. Not grudgingly. Not by constraint, except the constraint of the Saviour's love,—counting it an honor and privilege.

3. *We should do it earnestly*. "Fervent in spirit," &c. With our might. With the heart. Should be our meat, &c. With the *whole* soul.

4. *We should do it constantly.* The Lord's work is continuous. The work of all days, all seasons, all circumstances. Let us not be weary, &c.

5. *We should do it humbly.* Without self-exaltation. Doing all to God's glory. Remembering the greatness and goodness of the Master. Remembering our obligations to him. Remembering the imperfection of our services.

6. *We should do it, relying on the communications of Divine grace.* God's grace alone sufficient. This must be sought, and relied on, and honoured. Without Christ we can do nothing.

III. FOR OUR SPIRITUAL WORK EACH MUST GIVE AN ACCOUNT TO GOD. This accords with reason, with equity. With the express doctrines of scripture.—Matt. xxv. This should be remembered. Should constantly influence us.

APPLICATION.

1. Are we working for Christ? If so, in what way? To what extent? In what spirit?

2. *How fearful the doom of the slothful!*—Matt. xxv. Not an enemy. Not a rebel, but a servant.

3. *How great the rewards of the righteous.* Including dignity, joy, and eternal blessedness.

THE GREAT FEAST.

“And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations,” &c.—*Isa.* xxv. 6—8.

THERE can be no doubt that the text has a distinct reference to Gospel times and Gospel blessings. Indeed it is quite clear that this is one of those rich evangelical passages with which the writings of Isaiah so fully abound. The text is a fine specimen of the eastern imagery with which the sacred scriptures are so beautifully fraught. Let us, then, in the spirit of holy enquiring meditation, endeavour to ascertain the import of the theme under consideration. Observe then, the place,—the festival,—and the blessings identified with it. Observe,

I. THE PLACE. “In this mountain.” No doubt referring to Zion. But Zion was typical of the church of Christ, and therefore we are to understand this mountain to signify the church or kingdom of the Saviour, represented as a mountain on account,

1. *Of its elevation.* In the world, but distinct from it: raised above it, rising heavenwards. Not of the earth, earthy—but from heaven, and of heaven, heavenly. Hence Christ said of his people, “Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” Sin sinks men into wretchedness and degradation. Grace lifts up, and the church is mid-way between earth and heaven. Described as a mountain,

2. *On account of its visibility.* The prominency and visi-

bility of the mountain are manifest to all. The mountain is seen at a distance. With the sun shining upon it, it cannot be hid. Just so the Saviour's church is to be seen and known. A city on a hill. A *visible* kingdom. A *glorious* building. Satan's kingdom is set up and seen, and Christ's is to confront it—to overthrow it. On account,

3. *Of its stability.* The mountain is ever the symbol of firmness and immovableness. So the church of Christ is invulnerably secure and immoveable. Like Mount Zion, it cannot be moved. "On this rock will I build my church," &c. All the efforts of earth and hell have been unable to overthrow it. Observe,

II. THE FESTIVAL. Now this feast is to be in the church,—in the kingdom of grace. As a rich feast it is to be distinguished for,

1. *Its variety.* The banquet table is strewed with the most varied and choicest dainties from the eastern pasture and vineyard. All spiritual blessings are provided in the Gospel feast. Stores for the understanding. For the judgment. For the conscience. For the affections. Every exigency met, every want and holy desire supplied. For,

2. *Its abundance.* Here to plenty. No lack. Enough, and to spare, &c. Enough for each, &c. For,

3. *Its hilarity.* A joyful feast. Such was the feast when the prodigal was received back. Gospel blessings fill with joy, &c.—See Psa. lxxiii. 4 & 5. See an emblem of it in the case of the Jews in Nehemiah's time.—Neh. viii. 9, &c. It is in the church we may sing,

"The sorrows of the mind," &c.

The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, &c.

Notice,

III. THE BLESSINGS IDENTIFIED WITH IT.

1. *The entire removal of moral darkness,* ver. 7. "Darkness hath covered the earth," &c. "Ye were sometimes dark,"

&c. The Gospel shall remove it. Introduce into day. The mists are dispelled by the power of the rising sun. So shall the sun of righteousness arise, &c. "All his people shall be taught of the Lord," &c. "Now ye are the children of light and of the day." Gospel knowledge shall be universal, cover the earth, &c.

2. *The complete conquest of death.* Death has been a ravager, a conqueror, &c. A whirlpool, or abyss, swallowing up nations, &c. But death is to be engulfed and swallowed up.

This was the case *in Christ's resurrection*. He overcame death, &c. He has now the keys, &c. He is now the resurrection, &c.

This is the case when the Christian, by faith, triumphs over it. To many, to die would be gain. They are delivered from all fear. They conquer, and cheerfully face it, and have the spiritual conquest over it.

In the great resurrection then shall it be swallowed up, and be no more. Swallowed up in *eternity*. See 1 Cor. xv. 20—26. See also ver. 52, &c.

3. *The public justification of his people.* "The rebuke of his people," &c., ver. 8. Here they have been maligned, reproached, misrepresented, despised. Then they shall be vindicated, confessed, honoured. Their *choice*. Their *sincerity*. Their *worth*, shall all be made evident before angels, and men, and devils.

4. *Every source of sorrow shall then be removed.* "God shall wipe away tears," &c. They now sojourn in the valley of tears. They sow in tears. Tears often their meat, &c. But they shall be wiped, &c. God shall do it and for ever.

APPLICATION.

1. *Congratulate the inhabitants of this mountain.* Happy are ye. Rejoice in hope. "For the mouth of the Lord," &c.

2. *Invite strangers, yea all, &c.* It is a feast for all people, &c. Plead, urge, &c.

MESSIAH'S TRIUMPHS.

“His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish.”—*Psalm* cxxxii. 18.

It is evident that from the 11th verse of this Psalm, there is a distinct prophecy relative to the Lord Jesus Christ. By comparing this portion of the Psalm with Luke i. 31, &c., and Acts ii. 30, &c., we have the true key to the signification of the Psalmist, and thus we are infallibly delivered from the possibility of error. In all cases, Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture. It is equally evident, that this prophecy has not yet been fully accomplished. It has been in the course of accomplishment for more than eighteen centuries, and it will finally receive its complete realization in the universal establishment of the reign of the Messiah. Our text contains a twofold declaration,

I. AS TO HIS ENEMIES. And,

II. AS TO HIS REGAL TRIUMPHS AND GLORY. Observe the declaration,

I. AS TO HIS ENEMIES. The enemies of the Redeemer are vast and various. Among these we notice,

(1.) The powers of darkness. The apostate angels leagued under Satan, the prince of the power of the air. Now these are all united in one compact of evil against God, and holiness, and against the happiness of his creatures.

(2.) The wicked rulers of earthly dominions. In all ages there have been such. Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Balak, and the kings of Canaan. Belshazzar and Herod, and the early Roman emperors. Pagan and infidel rulers. All who have lent their influence to tyranny and oppression, and irreligion.

The cruel persecutors of the people of God, in all ages and countries.

(3.) Infidel and blasphemous scoffers. Men who have written against the religion of heaven. Porphyry, Julian, and Bolingbroke, and Hume, and Paine, and Hobbes, &c. Men whose intellects and genius have have been consecrated to works of evil. Wandering stars. Founts of corruption and death.

(4.) False teachers and antichrists. Corruptors of the truth. The inventors and supporters of worldly systems of religion. Enemies of the cross of Christ. Seducers from the Gospel. In this rank we must place all religious impostors and deceivers. From the false Christs of the apostles' days down to Mahomet, and from Mahomet to Joanna Southcot, and Smith, the degraded Mormanite.

(5.) All pagan priests and worshippers of idols. This is a public poring of contempt on God. Every pagan temple,—altar,—sacrifice and ceremony,—are in open war with the kingdom of Jesus.

(6.) All obstinate and unbelieving Jews. They have had the true light. They have in their possession the very oracles which speak of Christ. But they have closed their eyes, and shut their ears, and hardened their hearts. They are still doing over again the work of their Fathers, in despising the Messiah, and putting away from them the only Christ.

(7.) All wicked violators of the laws of heaven, and such as are in unbelief. The unconverted in our own land. Those who do not receive the grace of God in faith. All who refuse their allegiance, and love, and obedience to the Saviour. Such are his enemies, and such shall be clothed with shame. See Psa. cix. 29. They are often so,

(1.) In the depths of their mental and moral wretchedness. When their resources fail them, in the day of affliction, or sorrow, or death. It is said of Julian, after a most bitter and persevering opposition to Christ and his cause, exclaim-

ed, gnashing with his teeth and biting the earth, "O Galliean, thou hast overcome!" This is often the end of the ungodly.

(2.) This will be so, by the utter ruin of all the obstinate foes of Jesus. We cannot tell how this will be effected on the nations, &c., which will not bow to Christ, but it is clear such shall be destroyed, and leave this earth ultimately to be the residence and portion of the meek followers of Christ. See Psa. xxxvii. 9: xii. 13: xxxv. 36. See especially Psa. ii. 6, &c.

(3.) It will be fully realized in the last great day. Then the wicked shall arise to everlasting contempt. Then be disowned, and convicted, and condemned, and punished. 2 Thess. i. 7, &c. Now consider,

II. THE DECLARATION CONCERNING CHRIST. "But upon himself shall his crown," &c. Now here,

1. *The monarchical dignity of Christ is assumed.* The kingdom of Christ is everywhere attested. He is King of Zion. King of the whole earth. King of kings. His kingdom is a universal kingdom, &c. A righteous sceptre is the sceptre of his kingdom. He is the Supreme Governor. He is appointed "Heir of all things." Observe,

2. *His crown is adverted to.* "His crown." Now confining the subject to Christ's spiritual and mediatorial kingdom; Observe,

(1.) His crown was obtained by conflict. He fought for it. He encountered all the hosts of hell. The legion of evil. He gained the conflict,—obtained the victory. See Col. ii. 15. Psa. lxxviii. 17, &c.

(2.) By suffering. His kingdom and people he had to redeem by his own blood. This is an important view of Christ's crown. It is vividly described, Phil. ii. 6, &c.; Heb. ii. 10, 11; and Rev. iv. 6, &c.

3. *The glory and prosperity of Christ's royal character is affirmed.* "Upon himself," &c. This shall be realized in (1) The extension of his dominion. "From the rivers," &c.

(2) In the multitude of his subjects. As numerous as the dew-drops of the morning. "In him shall all the families," &c.

(3.) In the discomfiture of his enemies, &c. "He will overturn," &c. His enemies shall become his footstool, &c.

(4.) In the felicity of his people. Abundance of peace and joy. Universal harmony and blessedness, &c. Nothing shall vex, &c.

"Blessings abound where'er he reigns," &c.

(5.) In the consummation of his kingdom and glory. All enlightened, sanctified, and saved in him. His soul satisfied. All united in Christ. All blessed in him, and all proclaiming him blessed, &c. Now this declaration of the text is certain. It must be,

From the superior power of good over evil.

From the very essentials of the covenant.

From the affirmations of God's mouth.

From the glory of both the Father and the Son.

APPLICATION.

1. *Does the subject interest you?* Your minds; hearts, &c.

2. *Does it engage your energies?* Are you with Christ, and against his enemies?—Interested, devoted, praying, labouring, conflicting. All such shall reign with him, and sit on his throne, &c.

3. *To the enemies of Christ.* Persevere not. O, bow down,—sue for mercy. Kiss the Son, &c.

THE PRAISES OF THE LIVING.

“The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I *do* this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.”—*Isa.* xxxviii. 19.

THE text is connected with the history of Hezekiah. He was sick, and nigh unto death—indeed the mandate had gone forth: “Set thine house,” &c. In answer to humble and fervent prayer, the sentence was reversed, and his life was spared fifteen years. Hezekiah, on his recovery, composed the following pathetic and pious ode, v. 10, &c. Of this holy and edifying Psalm, our text forms a part. Let us enter on the meditation of it in the spirit of the prayer of Moses, the man of God. “So teach us to number,” &c. We ask,

I. FOR WHAT SHOULD THE LIVING PRAISE GOD?

1. *For life itself.* Life is God’s good gift. Life in its origin,—in its progress—exhibits the care and bounty of God. “He made us, and not we,” &c. “He holdeth our souls in life.”

2. *For life in its privileges.* And who can number these? Privileges of receiving good. Of receiving knowledge, and grace, and happiness. Privilege of doing good—of imitating God,—resembling God. Being godly,—growing in godlikeness. Honoring God, &c. These privileges are countless. Hearing and reading the Word. Meditation and prayer. Repentance and restitution. Faith and obedience.

3. *For life and its hopes.* Hope is the sunshine of life’s day. The *favorable* breeze of life’s voyage. The *flowery* path of life’s journey. The *balm* and sweetness of life’s existence. The *solace* of life’s sorrows. But then hope also goes beyond life,—it draws the curtain, and beholds in

the distance the goodly land. It brings immortality and glory near. It recognizes the conquest over death and the grave. It brings near to us a brighter, happier, and an eternal world. It sings, "Though this the earthly house," &c. "In my Father's house," &c.

II. IN WHAT MANNER SHOULD THE LIVING PRAISE GOD?

1. *With true gratefulness of heart.* No service is acceptable without the heart. Praise, especially, must be heartwork. The heart must muse until the fire burns. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is *within me*," &c. From the fulness of the heart, &c. Without this, however musically correct, however sweet, &c., it is formality and hypocrisy before God.

2. *Earnestness of spirit.* Not languidly. Not lifelessly; but with fervour of spirit. We are to exult in God. To extol. To magnify, &c. We are to make a joyful noise, &c. The praises of the redeemed are as the sound of many waters, &c. See also Rev. vii. 9, 10, &c.

3. *With cheerful constancy.* We are to bless the Lord at all times. In everything to give thanks. Praise is suitable to all places and times. In the *sanctuary*. "Enter into his gates," &c. At the *social* service,—Christ sang a hymn at the establishment of the eucharistic supper. In *family worship*. What so proper as that the living family should unite, &c. In the retirements of the closet. On his bed the Psalmist praised God, &c. Hence the poet sweetly sings,

"I'll praise my Maker," &c.

III. WHAT ADVANTAGES WILL ARISE TO THE LIVING FROM PRAISING GOD?

1. *It will cheer and elevate the soul.* The praising soul is like the joyous bird on the wing, rising upwards towards the skies. It gives vigour and elasticity to the mind.

It tends to remove depression and despondency. The joy of the Lord is our strength.

2. *It will be peculiarly acceptable to God.* Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth God. It is acknowledging God. It is blessing and honouring God. God will approve and smile upon the grateful, praising Christian.

3. *It will recommend religion.* The idea of the world is, that religion is a gloomy system,—necessarily melancholy. (Hume and Bishop Horne.) Sacred cheerfulness and songs of praise, should remove this false delusion. The Christian should sing,

“The sorrows of the mind,” &c.

“Thy statutes shall be my songs,” &c. “They shall return and come to Zion,” &c.

4. *It will tend to meeten the saint for glory.* Heaven is one vast temple of praise,—myriads of the redeemed sing and praise God. Eternity will be too short, &c. Now we must have the spirit of praise while we live, so that like Simeon, we may die praising Him. Praising God when all is right and spiritual, is heaven on earth,—blessedness on the way to glory.

APPLICATION.

1. *Our subject should claim the attention of all present* We are the living. On us the exercise of praise devolves. Do you bless God? Have you the true spirit of praise?

2. *Let us praise God for the greatest of all his gifts.* That of his dear Son. “Thanks be to God,” &c. “Worthy is the Lamb,” &c.

3. *To those who never truly praise God.* Have you no reason why his long-suffering should lead you to it?—Praise God that you are living—not dead—not lost. Within the circle of means, and in the region of hope. Praise him for these things, &c. Seek the spirit of praise.

THE FAITH OF THE SAMARITAN.

“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, who testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days,” &c.—*John iv. 39—42.*

Few narratives exceed in interest, and in graphic, and beautiful description, the history of the woman of Samaria. (1.) The previous character of the woman ; (2.) The circumstances under which she met Jesus ; (3.) The nature of the conversation ; (4.) Her prompt faith in the Saviour ; (5.) Her eager desire to tell her neighbours ; And, (6.) The happy results of her zealous endeavours ;—are all points on which we could dwell at great length to our instruction and edification. Her simple, plain, and hearty ministry, was greatly blessed and honored to the good of many precious souls. She convinced several by her testimony, ver. 39. She also brought many more to hear and see for themselves, and of these a number made a good confession, ver. 41, 42. Let us try to seize on the more striking parts of this portion of evangelical history. Observe,

I. TESTIMONY IS ESSENTIAL TO FAITH: ver. 39. There must be something published. Either by the mouth or pen, some word spoken or written. Faith comes by hearing, &c., or reading. The Bereans. See text. Now the testimony must be credible, resting on good and sufficient evidence. Thus this woman testified of what she had *seen* and *heard*. So the apostles testified concerning Christ what they knew,

and had seen, and heard. So Christian ministers preach the great facts of the Gospel as in the language of the apostle, 1 Cor. xv. 1, &c. No facts are better attested than those of the *life, sufferings, and resurrection* of Christ—and who, believing these, can refuse to receive Him as the Son of God? The testimony of his *disciples*, who had everything to lose, and nothing to gain, by their profession. The testimony of Jewish *historians*. The testimony of *pagans*. The testimony of the *fruits* of religion in the hearts and lives of thousands.

II. SUFFICIENTLY AUTHENTICATED TESTIMONY DEMANDS OUR BELIEF. It is egregious folly not to believe when the evidence is sufficient. What would the opposite in reference to Christ involve?

(1) That myriads of disciples lived and died to give currency to a lie or delusion.

(2) That even the Jews, who hated Christ, should support this testimony of falsehood.

(3) That the wisest and best of many nations, for 1800 years, without any advantage, should keep this delusion up by avowing their experience, and exhibiting a Christian profession. Now the rejection of christianity and the Gospel. must involve all this. We demand, therefore, your clear, decided, and hearty belief of the Gospel testimony.

III. FAITH IN CHRIST LEADS TO SUPREME LOVE FOR, AND DELIGHT IN HIM. “They besought him that he would tarry with them,” ver. 40.

1. *How interesting the suitors on this occasion.* The newly converted Samaritans. Their love flaming,—their zeal burning. Whence this desire,

- (1.) To *hear* more from Christ.
- (2.) To *see* more of Him.
- (3.) To *enjoy* more.
- (4.) To be *better grounded* and established.
- (5.) To have more *sensible* communion.

Ought not this to be our desire? To have Christ in our *hearts*. In our *families*. In our *schools*. In our *churches*. In our *means*. Christ *really, sensibly, constantly*, yet by his Spirit. Observe,

2. *How condescending was the Saviour*. "He abode two days." A long period, when you think of his *divinity*, and his *great work*. Yet affectionate, earnest prayer, constrained him. And so it ever does. Prayer obtains and retains Christ. To faithful prayer. He says, "Be it unto thee," &c.

IV. CHRISTIAN FAITH SHOULD BE REASONABLY AND MAGNANIMOUSLY PROFESSED. "Now we believe." Here observe,

1. *Christian faith may be certainly ascertained*. They believed, and knew it. No hesitation. No doubt. "I know whom," &c. Hence the eunuch, "I believe," &c. The chasm is so wide between disbelief and faith. States of mind so different. So contrary.

2. *Christian faith has its grounds and reasons*. "Now we believe, not because of thy saying," that is, not on account of that *merely*. They had *heard, understood, credited*, and felt the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. "For we have *heard* him," &c., and KNOW that this is INDEED, &c., 42, now no *doubt*, perfectly satisfied.

3. *Christian faith when thus realized should be declared*. Hence the Christians were called *confessors*. See Rom. x. 9. *Christ Jesus* has set us the *example*, 1 Tim. vi. 13. See Heb. xiii. 13. Christ also speaks on this subject very solemnly. "Whoso *confesseth* me," &c. "Whoso is *ashamed* of me," &c. We should confess,

(1) From a sense of love and gratitude to Christ.

(2) From a desire to benefit others. See the woman of Samaria. So all Christians should in their own way and sphere, teach and preach Jesus Christ.

(3) For our own happiness. It will strengthen us. Make us magnanimous. Give us courage. Please the Saviour.

It may expose us to the infidel's *sneer*. To the worldling's *laugh*. To the reproach of the *profane*. To the persecution of enemies. To the loss of *friends*. To suffering, &c. Yet Christ, *conscience*, and *christianity*, all demand it.

V. THE CHRISTIAN CONFESSION IS ONE OF MERCY TO THE WORLD. They testified "That Christ, was the Saviour of the world," ver. 42. They felt him to be their *Saviour*. They knew him to be the *other*. He had said so again and again. Hear his sermon to Nicodemus, John iii. 14—17. Surely this is enough. But let his servants also speak. *Isaiah*,—"All we like sheep," &c. *The Baptist*,—"Behold the Lamb of God," &c. *Paul*,—"Who gave himself a ransom for all," &c. *John*,—"Who is the propitiation for our sins," &c. "This we know and testify," &c.

IMPROVEMENT,

1. *Learn not to despise any instrumentality however simple*. Here is a woman—*illiterate*, &c. Remember Naaman and the little girl.

2. *Imitate the spirit and conduct of the Samaritans*. Their spirit in *hearing, believing, constraining* Christ. Their spirit in making an open confession, &c.

3. *Let us glory in Christ as the willing Saviour of all men*. O, this is the *brightness and glory*, of the Gospel.

"Oh, that the world might taste and see,
The riches of his grace!
The arms of love that compass me,
Would all mankind embrace."

"Oh, that my Jesus' heavenly charms,
Might every bosom move,
Fly, sinners fly, into those arms,
Of everlasting love !"

"Happy if with my latest breath,
I may but gasp his name;
Preach him to all, and cry in death,
Behold, behold, the Lamb."

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.

“The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away.”—*John* xix. —21.

IT is impossible to reflect on the mixture of superstition and wickedness which distinguished the Jews, in their conduct towards Jesus, without the utmost astonishment and wonder. They adopt the most base methods of conspiracy to ruin him. They bribe one of his disciples to betray him. They suborn false witnesses to swear away his life. They raise a tumultuous clamour for his blood. They prefer Barabbas, a murderer, to Jesus. They reproach him on the way to the cross. They revile him in the midst of his dying agonies; and then, under the influence of superstitious veneration for the rites of Judaism—they go earnestly entreating Pilate, that the death of those who had been crucified should be accelerated by breaking their legs, lest the bodies should remain suspended on the sabbath, which was in the parenthetical language of the text, “A high day.” What hypocrisy! What infatuated self-delusion! What a picture of the deceitfulness, and depravity of the human heart! But we select the text, that we may apply it to the Christian sabbath, and the devout feelings we should have towards it. The sabbath, in question, was especially great to the Jews, because it was the first day of the Paschal feast, and especial ordinances were connected with it. Let us enquire,

I. WHEN THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH, OR LORD'S DAY, MAY BE CONSIDERED A HIGH DAY.

1. *It is so in itself.* It is the day of the Lord's victory and triumph. The day made especially for himself. The day of hope and assurance to our fallen world. All the great and momentous concerns involved in the reality of Christ's Messiahship, &c., are identified with this day. With this, in one sense, began a new era in our world's history.

2. *It is so in the privileges it confers.* Much more than a day of rest from physical toil and secular labour. Day of especial mercies. The more public worship of God. The exercises of prayer and praise. The hearing of the glorious gospel. Fellowship with the saints, etc. Private reading and meditation, etc.

3. *But it is so as being associated with many of our greatest blessings.* In most cases it was on this day that serious reflection commenced. Solemn conviction. Holy resolution. Believing decision. Open profession. Most of our refreshing seasons, and edifying opportunities, etc.

4. *It is so as a beautiful type of heaven.* The apostle Paul speaks of three sabbaths.

(1.) The original one, on which God rested.

(2.) The spiritual sabbath, which we experience by faith on Christ. "We who have believed do enter into rest."

(3.) The heavenly one. There remaineth therefore, a rest, or keeping of the sabbath, etc. The cessation of toil, and din, and confusion, and anxiety. Its spiritual services. Its holy joys. Its sanctity, communion, etc., all point upwards to heaven.

II. HOW MAY WE CONTRIBUTE TO THE RENDERING IT IN AN ESPECIAL DEGREE A HIGH DAY. By being in the spirit, etc. God has done much, but we may frustrate that. How many myriads do so. How often have we done so? If we would have it a high day, then,

1. *Conclude as early as possible on the previous even-*

ing, the duties of the week. I know this is impracticable with many, but not with all. A late saturday evening of bustle and confusion is very unfavorable. Retiring to bed later than usual, etc. Many too, who profess religion, have to go to the tavern for their wages. The noise, and company, and filthiness of a tavern, are a bad preparation for the Lord's day. If intoxicating drink be indulged in, there must be all the heaviness and stupour, which must unfit for the exercises of religion.

2. *A conscientious devotion of the Lord's day to spiritual things.* Family should be still and orderly. There should be the exclusion of worldly topics of conversation. The putting away mere secular books, etc. The Bible and the book of praise should be the literary companions. There should be no idle gossiping. No wandering about. No feasting or parties. There should be the preparation for public worship. To be there in time. Not disturbing the minister and congregation, etc. The day should end in holy peace and tranquility.

3. *Especial prayer for the Divine presence and blessing.* How anxious to have right emotions and desires. "O, God my heart," etc. To have right desires. To be in the spirit of prayer, praise, hearing and meditation. Works of mercy and usefulness. Now all these must be sought of God. Earnest and believing prayer be offered, so that we may mount up as on eagles' wings, etc. Now consider,

III. SOME REASONS WHICH SHOULD MAKE US SOLICITOUS THAT THE SABBATH SHOULD BE A HIGH DAY.

1. *On account of the value of the sabbath itself.* How essential it is. How truly precious. What should we do, without it. What the church do. What be done for the world, etc. One of God's greatest mercies. Cannot be too highly prized.

2. *The sabbath materially will influence the following week.* It supplies spiritual food for the mind. It supplies

topics for thought. It presents motives, etc. It gives power, etc. How necessary then that it should be a high day. The week will generally be as the sabbath was.

3. *Our sabbaths are limited in number.* There are not many in a long life, and of course few in a short one. They will soon be gone. I remember those I spent in the sanctuary with my sainted father, and with my dear Christian friends—the last will soon come.

4. *For our sabbaths we must give an account.* Desecration of the sabbath is guilt and folly. Now the non-improvement of them will make bitter work for reflection. God will require an exact account, etc. in the great day.

APPLICATION.

1. *To the non-religious.* O, value this day of mercy. Do not despise it. “Hear, and your souls shall live,” etc.

2. *To Christian professors.* Be consistent. If it be the Lord’s day let him have its undivided hours, services, etc.

THE RUINOUS EFFECTS OF SIN.

“Righteousness keepeth *him that is upright in the way*; but wickedness overthroweth the sinner.”—*Proverbs* xiii. 6.

WE are often warned against evil in the word of God, by the most solemn statements as to the awful consequences of sin. It is written, “The way of transgressors is hard.” “God is angry with the wicked,” &c. “He that being often reproved,” &c. “Say ye to the wicked it shall be ill with him,” &c. And in the graphic language of the text, “Wickedness overthroweth,” &c. Let us,

I. Explain the character; and,

II. Prove, and illustrate the declaration.

I. LET US EXPLAIN THE CHARACTER. “The sinner.”

Sin is the transgression of the law, &c. All men while in a

state of nature are sinners. "All have sinned," &c. "There is none righteous," &c. Yet there are degrees and classes of sinners.

1. *There are sceptical and scoffing sinners.* Men who profess to disbelieve revelation. Who ridicule religion. Despise the Bible. Mock at piety. Deride the Christian character. Often glory in their shame, &c.

2. *There are profligate sinners.* These are given up to work iniquity. Go to the race course—the gambling house—the theatre, and you meet with them. Go to the tavern, and the house of dissoluteness, and you meet with them there. You here them belching out oaths and curses, and filthy speeches in the streets. They are eager to do evil. They drink it in as the ox, &c. Bear the mark in their forehead, &c.

3. *There are worldly-minded sinners.* These may be decent in their deportment, but the world is their God. The ledger or day-book their bible. Their trade, their only religion. All their time and toil devoted to gain the dust of the world. They are literally earth worms. They are grovelling in the dust. Time and the body absorb all. The soul and eternity forgotten.

4. *There are the formal, ;—the procrastinating sinners.* They give some heed to religion, to sabbaths, ordinances, preaching, religious duties. They have many convictions, desires, religious purposes. Yet they remain the servants of the evil one. They do not strive to enter in, &c. They do not come to the gospel feast. They are incessantly making excuses. Always putting it off, &c. Not far from the kingdom of God. Now most persons, if not all, are included in one or other of these classes. Will you inquire? Search yourselves, etc.

Let us,

II. PROVE, AND ILLUSTRATE THE DECLARATION.

"Wickedness overthroweth," etc.

Now wickedness of any kind or degree will do this. Just as one leak will sink a ship, or one mortal disease destroy life. So any kind or order of wickedness will condemn the soul. But it is equally true, that as all virtue or goodness has in its wake certain blessings, and certain exemptions from present evils; so the more wicked, and the more immediate, the more entire, and the more fearful the ruin produced. As proofs and illustrations of the text—observe,

1. *Wickedness often overthrows the health of the sinner.* Go to the hospital, and see how many have ruined their health by their course of life. That drunkard. That glutton. That debauchee. Nine-tenths of the suffering from disease originates in the wickedness of the sinner. Some blame chance. Some God. While the text contains the true solution. “Wickedness,” etc.

2. *Wickedness often overthrows the worldly prospects of the sinner.* Certain moral traits are necessary to success, even in worldly things. What youth would expect to prosper who discarded *truth, fidelity, industry*, from his vocabulary. But many whose prospects have been most flattering, have been entirely wrecked by a course of transgression; and thousands have been brought to want even a morsel of bread, through the vices they have pursued.

3. *Wickedness overthrows the character of its victims.* Is there any honor in being designated—an infidel, a liar, a swearer, a drunkard, a gambler, a profligate. “The very name of the wicked shall rot.”

4. *Wickedness overthroweth the lives of sinners.* The wicked do not live out half their days. They go to an early grave. Ponder on this! Look abroad! Observe the occurrences of society. How many fearful illustrations. The criminal on the scaffold—the suicide—the murdered—disease. Myriads who are aged at forty. Sin often lights the taper of life at both ends, and of course, existence consumes rapidly away.

5. *Wickedness overthrows the final hopes of the sinner.*

Wicked men exist extensively by cherishing a false hope. A hope that it will yet be well with them. That they will escape the fearful consequences of their transgression. That though they eat, they will not die. The devices of satan are numerous, in keeping these illusions in the mind; but wickedness overthrows all these delusions. They are as inscriptions written on sand, and the waters of mortality efface them all, and leave a blank of hopelessness and horror. The candle of the wicked not only his life, but his hope shall be put out. "The wicked is driven away," etc. This is the *last* overthrow. It is often *sudden*. It is always *terrible*; and certainly everlasting.

APPLICATION.

1. *The gospel has special tidings of joy for the sinner.* "This is a faithful saying," etc. Christ will save from sin, and rescue the sinner.

2. *We appeal to the self-interested feelings of all present.* We urge religion—it is your duty; but we urge it, it is your interest, present and eternal.

3. *Warn the incorrigible.*

THE WATERS OF MARAH.

“ And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord shewed him a tree, *which* when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them.”—*Exodus* xv. 24—25.

How varied and chequered are the scenes of human life. The triumphant song of Moses had just been sung with grateful ecstasy, and its celestial strains had scarcely died away, when we are called to behold a scene of the directly opposite character.

The Israelites travel three days' journey, in the wilderness, without finding water. This was a very great trial. None but those who have traversed the dreary deserts of the East, can duly judge of this great privation. At length they arrive at Marah, and here was an abundance of the fluid which they wanted; but alas! the waters were bitter, and unfit for use, and “ The people murmured,” etc. Observe,

I. THAT IN THE JOURNEY OF LIFE, MANY ARE THE MARAHS, OR WATERS OF BITTERNESS. Man's estate has been disturbed and rendered vexatious and sorrowful through the entrance of sin into our world. “ Man that is born,” etc. The very figure by which the world is represented. A desert. A wilderness, etc. There are,

1. *Personal waters of bitterness.* Our individual troubles and trials. Our temptations, etc. Every heart knows its own bitterness, etc.

2. *Domestic waters of bitterness.* Family afflictions and troubles. Incurable children. Afflictions,—separations, —bereavements, etc.

3. *There are church waters of bitterness.* When the people of God are languid, etc. Sion depressed, etc. When her friends forsake her. Her ordinances neglected, etc. See the case of Nehemiah, ii. 1, etc., and Jeremiah, Lam. vi. 1—4.

4. *There are worldly waters of bitterness.* Distresses arising from our connexion with it, etc. Losses, etc.

II. THAT EVEN GOD'S PEOPLE ARE LIABLE TO MURMUR, WHEN THEY COME TO THESE WATERS OF BITTERNESS.

1. *This is a truth which the history of the church strikingly attests.* The Israelites. Jacob. Elijah. Jonah.

2. *This is a truth which our own experience confirms.* How prone we have been to do so. Yea, sometimes, even in the anticipation of sorrow. How unyieldingly and self-witted we have been.

3. *This is a truth which exhibits the imperfection and influence of the pious.* It shows that self often predominates. That unbelief still exists. Sense and not faith, triumphs. That patience has not its perfect work. Such murmuring grieves God—is very offensive to him. Attacks his goodness, faithfulness, and wisdom.

III. THAT EARNEST PRAYER IS THE ONLY SOLACE AMID THE BITTER WATERS OF LIFE. “Moses cried,” etc.

1. *Now this is the appointed remedy.* “Call upon me,” etc. “Is any afflicted,” etc.

2. *This throws the burden on the Lord.* “Cast thy burden,” etc. “Casting all your care,” etc.

3. *This secures the interposition of the Divine help.* He has said, he will honor prayer. He has always done so. He ever will do so. He did so in the case of the text.

IV. THAT FAITH IN THE CROSS OF THE LORD JESUS, IS THE GREAT REMEDY FOR ALL THE BITTERNESS OF LIFE. The cross is the wood that makes the waters sweet, and faith in the cross, secures the blessing to us.

1. *Now in the cross we learn the transcendent love of God to us.* “If God spared not his own Son,” etc.

2. *In the cross we see the real desert of our sins.* Behold the misery we had justly incurred. That cross in all its agonies, was justly ours. We deserved it! Christ bore it for us, etc. What are our afflictions to those of Jesus?

3. *In the cross we have a model of patience and resignation.* Murmurer, go and see Jesus, calm—resigned—meek—pensive, and He left us an example.

4. *In the cross we have the ground of expectation laid, that God will deal mercifully with us.* He will send us help. He will give consolation, etc. He will make our sufferings the road to exaltation and glory—the path to joy and blessedness, etc. “Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss,” etc.

APPLICATION.

1. *Murmuring at the waters of Marah, only increases our own sorrow.* No joy or consolation ever came by murmuring. It displeases God. Darkens the sky. Blights the spirit.

2. *Let us expect these waters, and thus we shall not be disappointed.* There is a need's-be for the sorrows of life, etc.

3. *Let our prayers be earnest, and have reference to the promises of God.*

4. *To the penitential sinner—look at the cross, and thy sorrow shall be turned into joy, &c.*

SKETCHES OF SERMONS
ON
SAVING RELIGION.

No. I.

SAVING RELIGION, SPIRITUAL IN ITS NATURE.

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”—1 *Pet.* ii. 5.

To understand the nature of true religion is of the very highest importance, both to our true peace here and permanent felicity hereafter. It is only true religion that can benefit us. That which is spurious must necessarily blight our expectations, and leave us the victims of disappointment and wretchedness. Myriads there are who profess to be religious, but who will never reap any solid advantages therefrom. To ascertain distinctly the character of God's religion, and his only is genuine, we must examine with the utmost care, his blessed Word,—for here all things are revealed which pertain to life and godliness. With a sincere desire to lead you to a clear and satisfactory understanding of this momentous subject, this series of discourses has been undertaken.

Our first topic is fully expressed in the text. Those who are truly religious, are “a spiritual house,” &c. We set out, then, with this essential principle, that Saving Religion is Spiritual in its nature; that is, that it pertains to the heart

and mind,—has to do with the inward man. Observe then,

I. SAVING RELIGION IS SOMETHING MORE THAN AN INTELLECTUAL PRINCIPLE. It is an intellectual principle; but it is also much more, and its intellectuality is of a spiritual kind. Knowledge and wisdom are often put for the whole of religion. Religion is described under the similitude of light, and its disciples are said to be of the day, and not of the night. Sin and ignorance in scripture, are often synonymous. But observe,

A man may *understand* the truths of the Bible intellectually, and not be possessed of Saving Religion. He may read and see the distinct doctrines and precepts of religion. He may be familiar with its Divine truths, and yet be entirely a stranger to the life of God in the soul. He may admit the Divine existence, attributes, works, laws, etc. He may admit the great doctrines relating to Christ's person, work, and offices. He may admit the doctrines of repentance, and see the necessity of holiness, etc. His mind may be well stored with great orthodox truths, and his heart yet be unaffected by Divine grace.

II. SAVING RELIGION IS MORE THAN A REGARD TO THE CEREMONIALS OF CHRISTIANITY. Christianity has its forms and ordinances. They are but few in number, and very simple in their nature. *Hearing* the word preached. *Baptism* into Christ. Remembrance of his death in the *eucharistic* supper. These are fully enjoined in the Divine word. We have both precept and example for duly and fully regarding them. But to these there may be the most regular and reverential attention, and yet we may be strangers to Saving Religion. There are many classes of *hearers*, who derive no saving benefit from hearing. Many may yield assent, and give personal attention to ordinances, without at all feeling their bearing on practical religion, or deriving any benefit from them.

III. SAVING RELIGION IS SOMETHING MORE THAN MORALITY. There can be no acceptable religion without morality, but there may be much morality without religion. The young lawyer was clothed with moral loveliness, so that it is said when Christ beheld him, "he loved him." Saul, of Tarsus, as touching the law, was blameless,—yet was truly ignorant of acceptable piety. However excellent morality is, it is not Saving Religion. Now observe then, Saving Religion,

IV. IS SPIRITUAL IN ITS SOURCE. It is the work of the Holy Spirit of God. Man, in his natural state, is *dead*, dead to God—dead in trespasses and sins. How is he raised and made alive? By the Holy Spirit of God. It is the Spirit that quickeneth. Religion is described as a moral creation. But this is effected by the power of God. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Religion includes a *new birth*, or regeneration. But we must be born of the Spirit, as well as of water. Religion is described as *vegetation*, but it is *spiritual vegetation*, the implanting of gracious principles in the soul, and their growth to maturity. It is called *circumcision*, but it is not circumcision of the flesh, but circumcision without hands. "Circumcision of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter, whose praise is of God, and not of men." So in the text, the believer is a *building*, or temple, but not of material stones, but a spiritual house to the Lord. He is a temple of the Holy Ghost.

V. SAVING RELIGION IS NOT ONLY OF THE SPIRIT, BUT IT IS THE SPIRIT'S WORK ON OUR HEARTS AND SOULS. It is the renewal of the inward man. The enlightenment of the understanding. The subordination of the judgment to the truth. The cleansing of the conscience. The sanctifying of the affections, and bringing the will into perfect obedience to God's gracious authority. Now all this is inward spiritual work, and is beautifully set forth in one of the

Old Testament promises, Ezek. xxxvi. 25, &c. And this agrees with the testimony of the Divine Teacher, "The kingdom of God is within you." And with the declaration of Paul, "The kingdom of God is not meat," &c. Hence also it said of the Christian, that the Spirit of Christ dwelleth in him. That it bears witness with his spirit, &c. "That they are new creatures,—all old things having passed away," etc.

VI. SAVING RELIGION IS EVIDENCED IN ITS SPIRITUAL EFFECTS AND FRUITS. There will be,

1. *Spiritual desires.* "Hungering and thirsting after righteousness," &c. Desires after holiness. Desires after God's favour and love. Desires of a divine and heavenly nature.

2. *Spiritual affections.* The love of spiritual things. The love of God in the soul. Love of Christians for their spiritual excellencies. Love of the truth for the truth's sake. Love of prayer. Love of praise. Love of meditation. Love of holiness. There will be,

3. *Spiritual communion.* Those who understand spiritual things will delight in spiritual fellowship. There will be fellowship with God,—communion with the Father, &c. The thoughts and emotions of the soul, will ascend to God. "Oh, God! thou art my God," &c. "On thee, O God! my soul is fixed," &c. "My meditation on thee shall be sweet." *Communion* with kindred minds. Delight in uniting in the means of grace, &c. They will sing and feel,

"And if our fellowship below,

In Jesus be so sweet," &c.

4. *Spiritual exercises.* The exercise of reading and hearing, and prayer and praise, will be performed spiritually. "The true circumcision who worship God in spirit," etc., etc. Finally,

5. *The conversation and life will be spiritual.* No fruit can be different to the tree which produces it. Carnal tree, carnal fruit. The conversation and life will be as is the heart. The new man, spiritual in his nature, will have a conversation according with the Gospel. His mouth will issue forth a pure and refreshing stream of gracious conversation. His life will yield holy fruit, acceptable to God, etc.

Learn,

1. *Not to be satisfied with the name and mere forms of religion.*

2. *True religion is internal in the heart.*

3. *Thus it will produce the fruits of holiness to the praise of Divine grace.*

4. *All that is essential to spiritual religion the Gospel reveals.* The Word of Truth, and the promise of the Holy Spirit to all who believe.

No. II.

SAVING RELIGION A RELIGION OF FAITH.

“Therefore it is of faith that *it might be* by grace : to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed : not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham ; who is the father of us all.”—*Rom. iv. 16.*

It is very clear that man must be saved and accepted of God, on the ground of the one, or of the other, of three things. His intrinsic excellency or freedom from guilt. His good deeds by which he atones for his sins. Or as an act of pure mercy on the part of God. Now as to the first mode, both the Bible and the human conscience testify as to man's guilt. “There is none righteous,” &c. “All have sinned,” &c. As to the second,—man, by his trans-

gression is so unholy, that he can do no good thing without the gracious help of God. Besides, as a sinner, his life is forfeited to the Divine law which he has broken. He cannot then, redeem his own forfeited life. So that we are shut up to the third process, if saved at all, it must be by a pure, free act of God's grace. This is the reasoning of the apostle, of which the text is the conclusion,—therefore it is of faith, &c. Let us consider,

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY FAITH.

II. WHAT CONNECTION FAITH HAS WITH SAVING RELIGION.

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY FAITH.

Faith is the credence given to testimony. The belief of what is declared. So that there must be some declaration or testimony given to us, before we can believe. Hence, "faith cometh by hearing," &c. Now the testimony or declaration, which is the ground of faith, is the Gospel.—The glad tidings of God's love to our world, in the gift of Jesus Christ. And that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into our world to save sinners. That he died for our sins and rose again, &c. That God was in Christ, &c. And that God in Christ, is willing and able to save all who come unto him by Christ. Now this is an epitome of the glorious plan of salvation. Now observe,—All this is distinctly revealed in the Holy Scriptures. These scriptures make known these truths to us, and our faith is demanded in them. Faith then, receives this testimony of God as true; that is, the intellectual part of faith. Faith heartily and joyously rests on this testimony; that is, the experimental exemplification of faith. Faith humbly appropriates the blessings of salvation in Christ to its need, and rejoices in them. *That* in connection with the other acts of faith, it introduces into the soul the *enjoyment* of the blessings bestowed. He then can say,—“He loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Now the warrant for all this is God's Word. He has said, he has so

loved the world, &c. I am one, &c. He has sent his Son to save *sinners*,—*I am one*. He came to seek—and to save the lost,—*I am one*. He taketh no pleasure in the death of a sinner,—*I am one*, &c. Whoso cometh, he will in nowise cast out,—I came therefore, &c. We add further, it is the *province of faith* to believe *all that God* has spoken. And to expect, and live and feel, as though we already possessed all that he has *promised*. Such, then, is the *faith* which is an essential principle of religion. Notice then,

II. WHAT CONNECTION THIS FAITH HAS WITH SAVING RELIGION. (1.) It has not any connection of merit. It is the opposite of this. So says our text. So says the united testimony of scripture. So we have shewn in the great truths to be believed. Faith *hears* God's love and mercy in the Gospel. Faith sees the Lord Jesus as the only sacrifice for sin. Looks to the cross of Christ entirely. Faith receives the gift of God,—comes with an empty hand, &c. Does nothing that can include the least worthiness. We are saved by and through faith, but not *for* it. But observe the connection of faith,

1. *With the commencement of Saving Religion in the soul.* By the Word of God the sinner has been brought to see and feel his lost and ruined state. That he is naked, and *faith* receives and puts on the *robe* of salvation. That he is *poor*, and *faith* receives the pearl of great price, and the unsearchable riches of Divine grace. That he is *guilty*, and *faith* looks to the great *surety alone* for acceptance and pardon. *Polluted*, *faith* at once plunges into the *fountain*, &c. That he is perishing, and *faith* rolls the soul on the *one great and precious foundation*. That death and hell are before him, and *faith* flies into the city of refuge and is safe. Hence, then, you see how *faith* has to do with the commencement of religion. Observe,

2. *Its connection with the progress of Saving Religion.*

When a sinner is justified, that is, pardoned and accepted of God, and regenerated, religion then is only begun,

(1.) There is the progressive work of sanctification. The building up of the soul. The growth of the child of God. The perfection of the graces and virtues,—the meridian noon of holiness and bliss. Now faith believes and meditates on that truth of God's Word, by which the soul is fed and nourished. "As babes they desire the sincere milk of the word," &c. "Sanctify them by thy truth," &c. "I commend you to God," &c.

(2.) The life of the Christian is one of trouble and trials. But God has engaged to support and keep,—to sanctify all their afflictions. Now faith looks to the promise and realises the help, etc. Faith casts all the care and burden on the Lord, etc. Faith calls on the Lord in the day of trouble, etc. Faith sings, although the fig-tree shall not blossom, etc. "We know that all things work," etc.

(3.) The life of the Christian is one of conflict, as well as of trouble. These conflicts have to do with three enemies: the *world*. This both tries to allure and fascinate, and also to terrify. It labours both to beguile and alarm. How do we overcome the world? "This is the victory," etc. Faith recognizes it as an enemy's country. Looks to the better land. Sings, "This is not *my rest*," etc.

"I seek a country out of sight,
A city in the skies!"

Faith lifts the Christian above it. There is the *unsanctified nature* within. Faith crucifies the flesh. Mortifies the deeds of the body. Brings into the soul the cleansing balm, etc., confesses sin, and obtains forgiveness. Then there is our great adversary, the devil. He tempts and harasses the soul. Faith holds fast to the Divine Word. Satan says, God has forsaken thee. Faith says, God has said, "I will

never leave," etc. Satan says, We shall never hold out,—we shall fail to persevere. Faith says, God's grace is sufficient,—the Divine strength shall be given. "As our day is," etc. Satan says, we shall perish after all. Faith says, that Christ's promise runs thus: "My sheep shall never perish," etc. Thus faith is the shield by which we quench all the fiery darts of the devil. Now remember all the appointed means for the *security* and happiness of the Christian life, faith receives and applies, etc. Observe its connection,

3. *With the conclusion of the Christian life, and eternal glory.* The spiritual race is run throughout by faith,—the Christian perseveres till he touches the goal. The sick chamber is irradiated by faith. It supports when the constitution gives way. When pain, etc., indicate the taking down of the tabernacle, etc. "We know," etc. Faith produces resignation to the Divine will. "To live is Christ," etc. Either to wait, as Job said, "I will wait," etc. Or as good old Simeon, "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant," etc. And at length the Christian *dies in faith*. Having served God and his generation, he falls asleep in Jesus. Hence as earth recedes,—now faith is lost in the visions of the beatified. The racer is welcomed,—the warrior crowned,—and an abundant entrance given, etc.

Learn,

1. *The inestimable worth of faith.* Have we faith? Do we credit implicitly the testimony of God? etc. Do we rest on Christ only? Do we live the life of faith? Looking not at the things which are seen, etc.

2. *We see the fearful nature of unbelief.* It disbelieves God's word. Despises God's mercy. Rejects God's Son. Refuses God's pardon. And hence keeps the soul under Divine condemnation and Divine wrath, and then sinks the spirit into the endless darkness of eternal despair.

3. *Call upon all to believe the Gospel and live.*

No. III.

SAVING RELIGION, A RELIGION OF LOVE.

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”—1 *John* iv. 16.

THERE are two peculiar modes of expression in the text, which are in harmony with other passages of Holy Writ, and which will first demand our attention. It is said of the character described, that “He dwelleth in God.” Moses in the 90th Psalm, exclaims, “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place,” etc. The same idea is enlarged upon in the 91th Psalm, v. 1, and 9. It evidently signifies making God the rest, and the chief good of the soul. To trust all *to* Him, and to seek all *from* Him. Then it is added, “God dwelleth in him.” Thus God delights in his people. He is their portion, and they are His portion. Paul speaks of this, 2 *Cor.* vi. 16: and *Romans* viii. 9, so verse 12. Now these two things are essential to saving religion: our dwelling in God, and God dwelling in us. So says the apostle Paul, “That Christ dwelleth in us, except we be reprobates,” *i.e.* disapproved persons. Having explained these parts of the text, we now proceed to that, which is the great subject of our present discourse. Let us consider,

I. THE OBJECTS AND NATURE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE: And,

II. ITS ESSENTIALITY TO SAVING RELIGION. Observe,

I. THE OBJECTS AND NATURE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE. We refer,

(1.) *To God.* God is the supreme object of our love. No age, or dispensation, or circumstance, can affect the great

commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," etc. He is to be the first, the highest object of our affection. Our love to God must be,

(1.) *Filial*. We are his offspring. He is our father.

(2.) *Reverential*. He is Jehovah, "Lord God, the high and lofty one," etc.

(3.) *Confidential*. Love which trusts in Him, relies on Him, etc.

(4.) *Grateful*. Our benefactor—our Redeemer. "We love Him," etc.

(5.) *Of delight*. Delighting in God—joying in God—blessing God, and being blessed in Him. Our love must refer,

2. *To God's people*. The love of the brethren: and it must embrace,

(1) *All of them*. However different in sentiment, or form of worship. If they love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

(2) Not in the *same degree*. This is impossible. Those we have seen—those who are most like Christ. Most lovely, etc. There are Christians who are so repulsive, that it is difficult to love them—to others you are *drawn* sweetly and almost *irresistibly*.

(3) They are to be loved *unfeignedly*, in heart. Not merely in pretence or profession.

(4) *Manifestly*. We are to shew forth our love to them. By our kindness of *speech*—by kindness of *spirit*, and of action: Prefer their *company*. "I am a companion of all them, etc." By *praying* for them. Praying for all saints. By doing them all the good in our power. "Do good, and communicate," &c.

(5) Without respect of persons. Not having men's persons in admiration. Not preferring the rich, and despising the poor. Respect of persons is sinful: and this is a great snare. Then our love,

3. *Must embrace all men*. Our neighbours as ourselves. Even our enemies—those who despise or hate us. Now this

love is not the love of complacency or delight, but of deep pity and compassion. Ready to return good for evil—blessing for cursing. “If thine enemy hunger, feed him,” &c. Such then are the objects and nature of Christian love. Now we remark,

II. ITS ESSENTIALITY TO SAVING RELIGION. It is so,

1. *As love is the very atmosphere of religion.* “Dwell-eth in love.” The air of the kingdom of heaven is love—pure, spiritual love. It is made so, by the Holy Spirit pervading it; and the spiritual soul can only live in it, and cannot live in any other.

2. *It is the chief element of the new nature, produced in regeneration.* Born of God,—born from above. Partakers of the Divine nature. Now the old nature is malevolent, its partakers are hateful, and haters of one another.

3. *It is one of the especial fruits of the Holy Spirit.* “But the fruit of the Spirit is ‘love.’” Gal. v. 22: The first and most immediate effect of his divine influence. Now where the spirit of God dwells, there will be his fruits.

4. *It is the necessary badge of Christian discipleship.* “By this shall all men know,” etc. Not by,

(1) Identity of religious features :

(2) Not by exact agreement of religious phraseology. For Peter complains of Paul : 2 Peter iii. 15, etc.

(3) Not by uniformity in religious worship, but by loving one another. Christ would have his religion known all the world over, as a *religion of love*.

4. *It is the great New Testament commandment.* The eleventh commandment. “A new commandment give I unto you,” etc. See how Christ dwells on it. Emphasizes and reiterates it. See John xiii. 34, see also ch. xv. 12—17.

5. *It is one of the chief features of our resemblance to Christ.* Many things in Christ above our imitation, but here he expects conformity. We are to be imbued with this spirit of our Lord. No other points of likeness can be sufficient, without this.

6. *It is indispensable to fellowship with God.* If we dwell in the darkness of envy or hatred, then we can have no fellowship with God. If we pray with these elements in our hearts, God will not hear us. The spirit of benignity and love must dwell in us, or God will have no communion with us.

7. *It is the leading element in true happiness.* It is the soul's real bliss. We may say so of *knowledge*, for that is the region of light to the understanding, or intellectual part of man. So also of righteousness, there must be integrity in order to peace. "If ye know," etc. But love is the region of ecstasy and rapture, to the whole soul. Here it finds satisfaction in its kindred region of gladness and delight.

8. *It is the great prerequisite for heaven.* A soul without love, is not only unfit for heaven, but could not enjoy it.

(1.) *The God* of heaven is love.

(2.) *The throne* of heaven rests upon immutable, eternal love.

(3.) *The Lamb* in the midst, etc. is the Saviour who loved, etc.

(4.) *The songs* of heaven all relate to the marvellous love of the Redeemer.

(5.) *The society* of heaven is one of pure unmixed love.

(6.) *The streams* are all flowing with love.

(7.) The absolute *satisfaction*,—the plenitude of bliss is, bathing in the eternal ocean of love.

8. The *law* of heaven which binds God to all the beatified, and all the glorified to one another, is the great Divine law of love. One word more cannot be necessary to shew you that—Saving religion is therefore a religion of Love! We ask in conclusion,

1. *Have you this love to God?* This reverential, grateful feeling towards God. Is it your desire to obey Him, please Him, and glorify Him.

2. *Have you this love to his people, and towards all men?*

3. *This love and happiness are inseparable.*

4. *Want of it and misery are equally so.*

5. A world where it exists not; where selfishness, and hate, and wrath, mark all its inhabitants, is *hell*.

6. Let Christians *cultivate* it. Cherish it—exhibit it; and thus honour God, and recommend religion.

7. *To the enquiring contrite penitent, God will shed it abroad, his love in their hearts.*

No. IV.

SAVING RELIGION, A RELIGION OF OBEDIENCE.

“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”—*John* xiv. 21.

THERE has been much dispute in the Christian church, whether salvation is of works or faith. Some have taught a system of mere morality, and have said, that by our own righteousness we are to be saved. Others have taught a system of mere faith, and have said, that faith without works is sufficient. Both of these views are diametrically opposed to the Gospel system, as taught by Christ and his apostles. Faith and works are both essential, but in their proper places. Inverted in their position, and they are valueless.

Hence in reference to pardon and justification, it is by faith only. “Through this man (Christ Jesus), is preached,” &c. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” &c.

Good works are to be the evidences of the genuineness of our faith. Hence James asks, “What doth it profit,” &c. ii. 14, &c. Then we see, that in reference to pardon and acceptance with God, it is—faith alone. But that it is productive of good works.

Hence *faith* is the *root*—obedience the fruit.

Faith the *soul* of religion—obedience the body, in which it becomes palpable.

Faith *enters* the Divine family,—obedience shews that we are the children of the family.

Faith receives the kingdom of God—obedience acts with the loyalty of good subjects. Hence Christ declares in the text. Also, verse 23—24, and chap. xv. 10 and 14. The principle, therefore, of the text is sufficiently established. It is only necessary then, that we define and specify, the nature of that obedience, which is essential to saving religion.

I. IT MUST BE EVANGELICAL. Not self-righteous obedience,—not the mere strivings of the carnal heart,—not the mere respectable morality which will do for the world; but the obedience of the *renewed heart*—the workings of *faith*—the fruit of God's Holy Spirit within us. Not so much *us*, as God working within us. "Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," &c. "What I am, I am by Christ's grace; and what I do, I do by his grace strengthening me." It is also evangelical, in opposition to *legal* obedience. In legal obedience there is a striving to *obey*, to be saved—to do and *live*; but here in evangelical obedience, I obey, because I am saved—I do, because I *live*. It is essential, therefore, that our obedience be evangelical.

II. IT MUST BE AFFECTIONATE. The obedience of love. "He it is that loveth me." "This is the love of God," &c. "If ye love me," &c.

1. *There is slavish* obedience, and this is invariably, irksome, galling. Look at the toiling Hebrew in Egypt. The driven Negro.

2. There is the obedience of the mere *hireling*. Their's is often performed cheerfully, but the eye is ever on the *wages*—on the *reward*. There is no ardent joy, or love to the service. But Christian obedience is *affectionate*. Look at that affectionate child, he heard his father's commands, with

delight he hastens to obey. He is happy in obeying! Now this is the reason why God must have first the heart, and then the obedience will be the obedience of love. Rom. vi. 17.

III. IT MUST BE UNQUESTIONING. We must ascertain clearly the will of God, and then do it. Do it without murmuring, or debating, or questioning the propriety of what God demands. Philip. ii. 14—15. We may not always see the design and fitness; but we should remember our ignorance, and who it is that commands.

It is not customary for servants to question the orders of their masters; or for children to question the orders of parents. How much less then, should believers question the commands of God. "Thus, saith the Lord" should be ever sufficient. Like Samuel, we should say, "Speak Lord," &c. Our eyes should be up to the Lord—our ears attent—our feet ready. Like the angels, "Ever hearkening to the voice of His word.

IV. IT SHOULD BE UNIFORM. God is to be obeyed at all times. Seasons or days cannot alter his claims, they are ever obligatory. If times could have affected His claims or our duties, then there never had been any need for suffering, for Christ's sake. When friends smile it is not so difficult. but if they frown, hate, revile or injure. If they forbid, there is the language of the apostles, "We ought to obey God, rather than man." Christian obedience must be the habit of the soul—the golden thread running through the web of life. It must be the walk of the Christian in this the house of his pilgrimage.

V. IT MUST BE UNIVERSAL. Have respect to all God's bidding. There are things prohibited, and they must be abandoned—avoided. There are positive injunctions, they must be practised. There are positive *institutions* in religion Profession—faith and *baptism*. Profession of discipleship in the Lord's Supper. Now, both moral and positive institutions must be obeyed. True obedience is only bounded by

the Divine word. A beautiful picture of this is presented in the record concerning Zacharias and Elizabeth. Luke i. 6. I add,

VI. IT MUST BE PERSEVERING. "He that endureth to the end," &c. "Be thou faithful," &c. "Press toward the mark," &c. The Galatians ran well, but at length were hindered. Of some of Christ's disciples, it is said, "They walked no more with Him." Of others—"They made shipwreck." Peter speaks of those who had returned as the dog to its vomit, and the swine that was washed, &c. Hence the exhortations of the apostles. 2 Pet. i. 5—10; chap. iii. 14—17. These then are the great features of that obedience which is essential to salvation. In order to this obedience,

(1) Seek a filial and willing spirit. Ask of God not only to write His law on your hearts, etc.; but to give you the spirit that will delight to do all his commandments.

(2) Have recourse constantly to the Saviour's grace. Of yourselves you cannot thus obey God. His grace is indispensable. His grace is provided. His grace in answer to prayer will be freely and effectually communicated.

(3) Rely for acceptance on the great sacrifice. Our souls and services are only acceptable to God through Christ Jesus. All must be laid on that altar, which sanctifies both the worship and the offering. Besides, our infirmities are so numerous that confession of sin, repentance and faith in the Saviour's blood, is constantly necessary. "If we say that we have no sin," &c. Our congregation consists of only two classes.

1. *The obedient, who realize in their experience the text.* To these I read one great and glorious promise. Rev. xxii. 14. "Blessed are they who do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

2. *The disobedient.* To these we say, "Turn ye, turn

ye, for why will ye die ?” “ Let the wicked forsake,” &c. If not, if you will resolutely set God at defiance, then hearken,—Rom. ii. 8, &c.

No. V.

SAVING RELIGION A RELIGION OF SELF-DENIAL.

“ And when he had called the people *unto him* with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”—*Mark* viii. 34.

THE Lord Jesus not only came to reveal the way of salvation, but also to exhibit all the great features of acceptable piety in his own example. In his discourses we have the great doctrines and precepts of Christianity presented to us. In his life we have these doctrines and precepts exemplified. Thus in the character of Christ, we have exhibited the true spirit of saving religion. In his condescension and conduct, a clear model for Christian imitation. Now this is expressed very distinctly in the text, and more at large, *Matt.* xvi. 24. Christ's disciples must follow in his steps. They must go after him. Hence he says, “ My sheep hear my voice,” &c. If we say that we have received Him, we must walk also as he walked. True saints are described as “ Following the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth.” The true Christian “ Sets the Lord ever before him.” “ He looks to Jesus, the author and finisher of his faith.” Now the Saviour connects this with the spirit and practise of self-denial. The man who is willing to be his disciple, must deny himself, &c. Now it is superfluous to say that the Christian must renounce a course of iniquity—this is too obvious to need proof, or even assertion. But he must be willing to forego even lawful things for Christ's sake. The very essence of self-denial

is—to be given up to the will of God, to yield yourselves to *do* it, and *suffer* it, for Christ's sake. Observe,

I. WE MUST DENY OUR OWN WISDOM, AND SUBMIT OURSELVES TO THE WISDOM OF GOD. Look at this in two or three respects.

1. *In the commencement of a religious course.* The way and principle of our acceptance with God, is very different to the notions of the human mind. We think that we can devise the best plan of returning to God; and the innate conviction is, that we must do *something*—or have some *recommendation*—some ground of *acceptance* in ourselves. This was the great stumbling block of the scribes and pharisees. They would not admit that they were blind and poor, &c. Now this *self* must be denounced, prostrated, crushed, before we can enjoy the Divine mercy, the soul must be dying of hunger, before it is fed. It must be *stripped*, before it is clothed. It must be *perishing*, before the hand of Christ is stretched forth to save. When they had *nothing* to pay, &c. How many are kept out of the kingdom of Christ, because they will not become as little children, and thus enter in the spirit of self-denial.

2. *In the direction of our steps the same truth applies.* Man must be self-guided, or guided of God. How often we think we are sufficient. That we have all the skill, tact, and experience, requisite. Lot thought so when he chose the well watered plains of Sodom. Solomon thought so, and hence made shipwreck. Now the great truth of revelation is—that it is not in *man* that *walks*, &c. Hence this self-wisdom must be renounced. We must commit our way unto the Lord, &c. Our prayer will be, “O Lord, teach me thy paths.” “Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel,” &c. “Lead me in a plain path,” &c. “In all your ways, acknowledge him,” &c. To do this *implicitly*, at all *times*, and in all circumstances, is one great exemplification of self-denial.

3. *In reference to extrication from troubles.* Often the

Christian is placed in strait and difficult circumstances. Just as the *Israelites* on their approach to the *Red sea*. *Jacob* when going to meet *Esau*. *Daniel* when exposed to the devouring lions. *Peter* in prison. Now in all these cases, God's wisdom directed. They did not trust in themselves. They did not rely on their own understandings. God counselled, and they obeyed. God directed, and they followed. Now this is one great evidence of true self-denial. To renounce our own *wisdom*, and to give ourselves up to the wisdom and will of God.

II. THERE MUST BE THE UTTER REJECTION OF ALL SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ENTIRE RELIANCE ON THE MEDIATION OF CHRIST. Self, ever abased, and Christ ever exalted. To trust to his mediation for every blessing. Not only when we *first come* to God for pardon, but ever afterwards.

(1.) However exemplary to attribute it to God's grace, "By the grace of God," &c.

(2.) However spiritual to trace it up to the Divine influence.

(3.) However useful to give the undivided glory to God.

(4.) In all our services to keep the eye of faith on the mediation of Christ. In *praise*, however fervent. In *prayer* however earnest and believing. In *duties*, however constant. In the profession of Christ, however consistent. "God forbid that I should glory," &c. "Christ is all, and in all."

III. IN SUBORDINATING ALL SELF-SEEKING TO THE WILL AND PLEASURE OF GOD. There are many things that may be laudably desired, and preferred in *themselves*. For instance,

(1.) Mediocrity of condition, rather than adversity. *Jacob* sought this, so *Agar*, "Give me neither poverty," &c. But self-denial bows sweetly to God, if it is his will that adversity be our lot.

(2.) Peace rather than opposition and persecution. It is

said of the primitive churches, that they had rest, &c. Now it is desirable to have our *privileges*, &c. But self-denial shrinks not from opposition and odium, and suffering for Christ's sake. Takes up the cross, and cheerfully bears it.

(3.) Health rather than sickness. It is natural and proper to seek health, &c. But self-denial says, in reference to affliction "The cup which my Father," &c. Now true self-denial *chooses* not—*dictates* not; but ever seeks to utter the submissive words of Jesus—"Not my will, but thine be done." It can sing with the poet,

"Good when he gives," &c.

Self-denial includes,

IV. THE CRUCIFIXION OF SELF, FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS. A man who is a stranger to the spirit of self-denial will stand for all his *own rights*. He will say, I may do this and that. I will only be bound by the great lines of right and wrong. Now what says self-denial, "All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient." Now see this fully illustrated, Rom. xiv. 1. The great principle is laid down, ver. 1. Our duty, ver. 13. This duty applied, 14, 15. Then its general application, ver. 21. The uniform spirit of self-denial is further inculcated, chap. xv. 1, 2. Now I would apply this to *dress*, which others might think *worldly*. To customs in meats or drinks, which others might think *perilous*. And the true principle is, to forego, even lawful things for the good of others, 1 Cor. viii. 9. We ought to prefer the salvation of our brethren to all other considerations. Now this is one of the great pillars of the temperance reformation, it induced me, more than ten years ago, cheerfully to abstain from every inebriating fluid, &c. It is well worthy of the pious consideration of all the people of God.

V. IT INVOLVES THE PUTTING OF OURSELVES AND ALL WE ARE AND HAVE, AT THE LORD'S DISPOSAL. See v. 35.

Christ may call us to great sacrifices and toils. To the loss of liberty, goods, life. Now self-denial would place body, soul, and spirit at the Lord's disposal. Surrendering all to Him. Live and die for Him. I can scarcely dwell on this, as we have so long basked in the sunshine of prosperity, and have such Christian mercies and privileges. But are we ready to suffer for Christ's sake? To count not our own lives dear, &c.? Who can answer? I need not dwell on self-denial being essential to saving religion, the text is decisive. Besides,

(1.) Without it there is no likeness to Christ.

(2.) No assurance of glory. "If we suffer," &c. These then are the *great terms of acceptable piety*. But forget not,

1. Sufficient grace is given.
2. Eternal glory is promised.

No. VI.

SAVING RELIGION, A RELIGION OF PRAYER.

"Continuing instant in prayer."—*Rom.* xii. 12.

ALL religions, whether true or false, recognize the duty of prayer. The Mahomedan often approaches God in the name of the Great Prophet. The Pagan bows down to his idol, supplicating good, and deprecating evil. The wild Indian utters his desires to the unseen Great Spirit. Hence it may be said that the religious emotions of the mind, those emotions which are natural to it, lead men, under all circumstances, to the exercise of prayer. Prayer formed one of the leading elements of patriarchal religion. Prayer was a

chief exercise under the Mosaic economy,—the tabernacle was for devotion as well as sacrifices,—and the temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations. In the religion of the New Testament this stands prominently out. Jesus was emphatically a man of prayer. When he taught the people, he instructed them how to pray. When he wrought miracles, he sanctified them by prayer. When he was baptized, he prayed. When he was transfigured, he prayed. In his agony in the garden, he prayed more earnestly. When he hung on the cross, his dying breath he spent in prayer. And now exalted on high, seated at the right hand of the Father, he ever liveth to make intercession for us. No proof more can be necessary that Saving Religion is essentially a religion of prayer. But we ask,

I. WHAT IS PRAYER?

II. WHAT MUST BE ITS DISTINGUISHING FEATURES?

III. AND HOW INSTANT PRAYER IS TO BE SUSTAINED?

I. WHAT IS PRAYER? Prayer is the presenting of the desires to God. Now this may be done,

1. *Without words.* When the longings of the soul silently, yet earnestly, ascend to God. When the heart ejaculates its wishes, without words, as Nehemiah did when in the presence of the Persian monarch. But while we may pray without audible words, we cannot pray without the heart. The desires must be those of the inward soul. The fervent emotions of the Spirit. And when this is wanting, it is not prayer. Or prayer,

2. *May be expressed in words.* This is the most usual form of prayer. Generally from the fulness of the heart the mouth uttereth. And in praying with words, there may be either words, extemporally conceived and expressed, or they may be in the words of scripture remembered by us, and appropriated as suited to our necessities. Thus many of the prayers of David. Thus the Lord's prayer.

Thus the prayers of the apostles in their epistles. And when persons from want of the gift of prayer, or from timidity and fear, cannot thus pray, there can be no reason why they may not use printed forms of prayer, and thus piously make known their requests to God. But it should be the desire of every Christian to have the gift of prayer, that they may be independent of all forms of prayer, and may at all times, and under all circumstances, approach the throne of the *heavenly grace*. Now in prayer, we may appropriately include,

(1.) The adoration and blessing of God.

(2.) Thanksgiving for former mercies,—*with confession of our sins*,

(3.) Deprecation of evil.

(4.) Supplication for the various mercies we need. And,

(5.) Intercession for the Divine blessing to rest on all men. With,

(6.) Pleading; that is, urging our requests, and using the Divine promises, and the mediation of the Lord Jesus, as the ground of our expectation, that our prayers may be answered. Observe,

II. WHAT MUST BE ITS DISTINGUISHING FEATURES?

1. *Sincerity*. In order to this we must feel our wants,—pray from an inward sense of our need and dependance: there can be no prayer without this. And without this, the service is hypocrisy, or at best a mere formal service. How needful and important to guard against this. “This people draw nigh to me with their mouths, and honour me,” &c.

2. *Simplicity*. Not to imagine that we must clothe our desires in words of elegance or grandeur. Remember that the mind can do nothing in this way *equal* to the mind of the lofty Being we *approach*. We should rather study child-like simplicity. How beautifully so, is the Lord’s prayer. “Our Father,” &c.

3. *Humility*. We must have due thoughts of our own

insignificance and unworthiness. If ever we should be bowed down as in dust and ashes, it is in prayer. Think of the majesty and glory of God. The grandeur of his throne. The purity of his nature,—and then look at our pollution and guilt. It is to the lowly that God looks,—with the contrite God dwells. “Though the Lord be high,” &c.

4. *Believing confidence.* “He who cometh to God,” &c. This is especially insisted on, that we have faith in God when we approach him in prayer. Let us just refer to a few passages of the Divine word on this vital subject: Jas. i, 5, 6.—Matt. xxi. 22.—Matt. xi. 24. Now our faith in prayer must have respect to two things,

(1) *God's promise.* And (2) *Christ's mediation.* Belief in what God has spoken, and what Christ has done, and is doing for us. Look at the first of these,—Luke xi. 9 & 13. John xiii. 13 & 16—23, &c. Hence the exhortation of the apostle:—“Let us come boldly,” &c.

5. *With expectation.* That is, we are to pray and watch thereunto. Look for what we have asked. So does the petitioner for the reply of his sovereign. So does the beggar for the alms he seeks. So should the Christian for the blessings he has sought. Look for the returns of prayer,

6. *With reverential submission.* Deferring all to God's wisdom and love. Leaving the *mode and time* to him who cannot err, bowing to that kindness and love which cannot falter or change. To that faithfulness that endureth through all generations. But the text calls us to *instant* prayer; that is, to constant persevering prayer. Therefore we ask,

III. HOW IS IT TO BE SUSTAINED? How are we to be *instant* in prayer? To pray always. “To pray without ceasing,” &c.

1. *By continuing to cherish a sense of our entire dependence on God.* Nothing can be more true than this. But we must recognize it—feel it—cherish it. Endeavour to realize it every moment.

2. *By daily intimacy with the Divine word.* We cannot read the scriptures without the flame of devotion being kept alive. If we read the scriptures in the spirit of lowliness, we shall catch the devotional feeling of its sacred writers.

3. *By duly regarding the means of grace.* The public means of grace,—the domestic,—the secret.

4. *By seeking from God the spirit of prayer.* The fire on the altar must never go out. If so, then we must be constantly bringing down the reviving Spirit of God into our souls.

APPLICATION.

1. *How greatly is the spirit of prayer undervalued by numbers of the professing Church.* Hence a speech, a sermon, or meeting, will attract them. But the meeting for devotion is slightly estimated and greatly neglected.

2. *How essentially prayer is connected with every part of experimental and practical religion.* If we would grow in knowledge, we must pray. In grace, pray. In joy. In vigour. In holy maturity. In usefulness. In fitness for life, or meetness for glory.

3. *We call upon the prayerless now to commence a life of prayer.* Seek the Divine mercy. Seek a heart to pray. Seek to enjoy the blessedness of prayer, and seek it this hour in the sanctuary of God.

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHARITY.

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity.”—1 *Cor.* xiii. 13.

THE apostle has been largely treating of the various gifts, ordinary and extraordinary, which God had dispensed to the Corinthian Church, ch. xii. v. 4. He then shows the mutual dependancy of the various members of the church on each other, and the spiritual harmony which should subsist between them. He concludes this statement with an exhortation, that they should covet earnestly the best gifts, but annexes to that advice the most beautiful exhibition of Christian charity, which, he affirms, is yet a more excellent way. The superior excellency of charity is then presented over knowledge, over almsgiving, and over faith, even of the most miraculous description, ver. 2. The sum and conclusion of the whole is given thus:—“And now abideth,” &c. Let us then,

Define its nature.

Shew its supreme pre-eminence. And,

Urge to its acquisition and exercise.

I. DEFINE ITS NATURE I need not say that by charity is meant love, and so the text should have been rendered. Now this charity or love must not be confounded with the emotions of mere animal affection or human sympathy. Nor with natural kindness and generosity. Nor with mere amiableness of spirit and temper. Nor indeed with any characteristic of the human heart which may be evinced by man in his unregenerate condition. It is the sacred fire of celestial love, enkindled in the heart by the Holy Ghost, given unto us. It is the spiritual emotion of the new nature, and as such necessa-

rily involves supreme love to God and delight in him. I need not dwell on the infinite and eternal claims he has on our most ardent affection. "We love him because," &c. But the text doubtless contemplates love chiefly in reference to mankind, and wherever love to God reigns, love to man will also be exhibited. The two are inseparable. Now what does it comprise? *Esteem* for man as one of our species. *Affection* for man, as of our kindred. *A benevolent* sympathy with man, as our fellow-heir of misery, trouble, and death. *An intense* desire for his well-being, and a generous readiness to help him and do him good. Now this love has many striking attributes and antagonistical principles. Among its attributes the apostle specifies,

1. *Kindness*. This is its breath. Its language. Its temper. Its conduct.

2. *It is long-suffering*. Bears and forbears. Not hasty and impetuous. Not easily provoked.

3. *It is ingenuous and unsuspecting*. Is not given to surmising. "Thinketh no evil," &c.

4. *It weepeth over sin and sinners*. "Rejoiceth not in iniquity," &c. It delighteth in goodness wherever it behold it. Its chief antagonistical principles are,

(1) *Pride*. Pride treats men with haughtiness and contempt. "Charity vaunteth not itself," &c. "Doth not behave," &c.

(2) *Selfishness*. Selfishness isolates man. Makes him the centre and end of all his actions. "Charity seeketh not her own," &c. Selfishness is the rankest and vilest idolatry of which man can be guilty, and the most malevolent and withering feeling which can curse and blight the soul.

(3) *Prejudice*. Prejudging the character or principles of men. How it has separated nations; divided the church; alienated friends; and prevented the free and heavenly flow of gospel charity in the world. Such then is the nature, and

such the attributes, and such the antagonistical principles of charity.

II. SHEW ITS SUPREME PRE-EMINENCE. We assert its pre-eminence over gifts, knowledge, faith, hope, and all other moral elements in the world. Now this is manifest if you consider,

1. *It is the essential nature of God.* It is not so much a perfection of the Deity as his nature. God is love. Pure, unmixed, infinite, changeless, everlasting love. All we know of God proves it. His name. His works. His providence. His wondrous act of sending forth his Son, &c. Paradise. Even the fallen earth. Heaven. Yea,—Hell itself.

2. *It is the great bond of all unions in the universe.* I begin with the highest and most sublime. (1) *God in our flesh.* God in the person of Jesus Christ. Was not this incarnate love? The embodiment of Jehovah's goodness. (2) The union of God and the regenerated Spirit. "He that dwelleth in God," &c. (3) The union of all holy, believing souls, with each other. It is this charity which is the bond of perfectness. (4) The union of angelic hosts with the human family. The love of Christ has secured their friendship, &c. So that burning with the seraphic flame they are all ministering spirits, &c. Now the absence of love has been the great cause of all the divisions, alienations, strifes, &c.

3. *Love will introduce and constitute the grandeur of the millennial age.* I know it will be a millenium of knowledge,—of holiness,—of peace,—and Divine glory. But its essential grandeur will be, that it will be the golden age of love. Then will be realized the song—"Glory to God," &c. The law of the world will be the law of love, and nothing shall disturb, or vex, or destroy, in all God's holy mountain. Every man will reflect the likeness of God, and every man's heart will overflow with fervent and unfeigned love to his fellow-man.

4. *Love is of eternal endurance, and will form the*

chief bliss of the beatified for ever. Names, creeds, and sectarian distinctions, which have been so many denominal niches of exclusiveness, will be swept away for ever. The *knowledge* of the earth will become invisible before the blaze of heaven's glory, as the radiant stars are seen not when the sun shineth in his splendour. Faith will be ratified in sight and realization, and hope in the fountain of ineffable blessedness;—but love will still hold her dignified position, and be as essential to the enjoyment of heaven as it was to the happiness of earth. The spark will then not be lost, but become a flame. The drop not absorbed, but swollen and increased to a river; and flow on, and on, and on, to all eternity.

III. URGE TO ITS ACQUISITION AND EXERCISE. Now I urge it,

1. *For its own sake.* It has no compeer in regard to intrinsic excellency. It is the brightest gem in the crown of the Redeemer. It is the light, and joy, and glory of heaven.

2. *For your own sake.* If you would have the first fruits of heaven on earth, love will impart them. If you want perfect bliss and enduring joy, love will ensure them. If you want both the badge and spirit of a Christian, love will confer them. If you would dwell in God and God in you, and thus obtain a perfect meetness for glory, love will infallibly secure it.

3. *For the Churches sake.* The church wants higher exhibitions of purity,—more of the spirit of self-denial,—more of the devotedness of enlarged generosity,—more of the meekness of the Redeemer's lovely disposition. But all these would follow if the church were baptized into the spirit of intense and celestial love. Thus she would put on her beautiful garments, and become the joy of the earth and the reflection of heaven.

4. *For the world's sake.* "The world which lieth," &c. O, what does it want? More *light*,—but love will diffuse its More *liberty*,—nothing but love will melt down the fetter. and chains of oppression and slavery, and own every man an

equal, a friend, a brother. We want the annihilation of crimes, and the restoration of the more debased orders of mankind. Physical restraints, prisons, tortures, and a scaffold, are almost powerless,—nothing but love will restore men to the emotions of humanity, goodness, and mercy. We *want wars* to cease unto the ends of the earth, but love alone shall be the radiant rainbow, spanning in its celestial embrace all the nations of the earth, so that the hellish profession of arms shall be abolished, and men shall not learn war any more. I urge it,

5. *For Christ's sake.* All the true followers of Jesus, are identified with his cause and concerned for His glory. This world was created by Him and for Him. He was offered a sacrifice for its guilt, and he is to exercise his sway of grace over it from the rivers to the ends of the earth. "He shall see of the travail of his soul," &c. But he will accomplish this by the agency of men, and the instrumentality of means. But love alone will provide the men, fit them for their work, and render the agency of heaven, under the Holy Spirit, successful. Read with me, 2 Cor. v. 13—15. Love is the great qualification of the preacher at home, and the missionary abroad,—of the tract distributor, and especially of the Sabbath School teacher. Love will thrust men into the vineyard, and sustain them in their toils. Nothing is wanted but a pure church, burning with love to evangelize the world, and hasten the period when the jubilee anthem shall be sung. Halleluia, &c. for the kingdom of this world, &c.

APPLICATION.

1. *Have we this love in our hearts?* Does it live, and glow, and burn within us? Is it influential on our hearts, spirits, conversation, lives? Is it evident to men, and does it reflect the image of the ever blessed God?

2. *All our duties and obligations should be moved by this*

power. All other motives are necessarily inferior, and should be subordinate.

3. *It is the duty, interest, and happiness of the sinner to receive and love the Lord Jesus.** Finally, let the genuine fruit of love be seen in our liberality on this interesting and momentous occasion, &c. Love to the dear children who are the germs of the next generation. To be blessings or curses to society. The friends or the enemies of Jesus. The ornaments or adversaries of the Christian church.

JUDE'S PRAYER FOR THE SAINTS.

“Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.”—*Jude 2.*

OUR text is the benevolent Christian desire of the apostle Jude, who was a son of Alpheus and a brother of James. You will remember it was this servant of Christ who presented that interesting question to the Redeemer:—“Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest?” &c. It is supposed that he wrote this epistle about the 65th or 66th year of the Christian era. It has been usual to denominate this a Catholic epistle, as it seems to have been addressed to the saints of Christ in general, and not to any particular class or congregation of believers. Hence it is inscribed “To them that are sanctified,” &c. Our present meditation has to do immediately with the benevolent salutation with which it commences. “Mercy,” &c. Observe, the text contains three distinct objects of the apostle’s desire.

I. MERCY.

II. PEACE.

III. LOVE. And that they all might be multiplied,

* Preached on a Sabbath-school anniversary.

I. HE DESIRES FOR THEM MERCY. Now this desire may include both the exercise of mercy towards them, and the exhibition of mercy by them. Indeed one is supposed ever to flow from the other. Divine mercy unto you. Observe,

(1.) They were already the subjects of mercy. Mercy had called and sanctified them. And yet,

(2.) They still required its communication,—and for this the apostle prays. Now they need it,

1. *In its sustaining and preserving power.* “Hold thou me up,” &c. “Kept by the power of God,” &c. In perils. In difficulties. In weakness, &c. All their hope and safety is in God’s mercy.

2. *In its restraining influence.* The restraints of Divine grace are of the highest moment. Numberless are the sins of the best,—but how many more would have been their apostacies, but for the restraining grace of God. God often keeps his people out of the way of evil. Preserves them from the edge of the precipice. Keeps from falling into the sins which do so easily beset us, &c. David blessed God who had kept him from evil.

3. *In its supplying bounty.* All our blessings,—are the streams of Divine mercy. So the apostle knew of the need of the saints of God, and this need in all its variety can only be met by mercy. All temporal, all spiritual, and all eternal good proceeds from the Divine mercy.

4. *In its restoring and sanctifying efficiency.* Infirmities and sins pertain to the holiest and the best. How often evil is contracted. Spots on our garments. Spirit cleaves to the dust, &c. Feet slide, &c. Now it is mercy that must restore and sanctify. Forgive our sins, and heal our diseases.

5. *In its accepting condescension.* “We labour whether present or absent,” &c. Now our acceptance is all of mercy. Abstract justice never could accept. Nor abstract purity. But God beholds us in mercy,—and thus in Christ Jesus we are accepted of him. So also our services and obedience.

6. *In its crowning glory.* Mercy must lay the foundation, rear the structure, and bring on the head-stone. Mercy to finish the work of grace, and mercy to bestow the rewards of glory. Eternal life is the crowning mercy. "The Lord grant that he may find mercy," &c.

II. PEACE. Here we may include,

1. *Divine peace within us.* This is ever the fruit of mercy. When God has forgiven, &c. in mercy, then he sheds his peace abroad in the soul. Being justified by faith, we have peace, &c. The storm is allayed. The waves are still, and behold in the soul the peace of heaven. Harmony and joy prevail where strife and confusion reigned. The dove hovers, where the vulture only dwelt. The lamb lies down, where the lion roamed abroad.

2. *Sacred peace reigning over us.* Being under the control of peace,—subjects of the Prince of peace. Breathing the spirit of peace. Striving for peace. Not the victims of confusion, but peace. Not the slaves of strife, but the sons of peace. When this exists, there will be a pacific spirit towards all men. The mind, and heart, and tongue, and character, will be all pacific. *Peace exemplified.* *Peace makers,* &c. He desireth in the salutation,

III. LOVE. "And love be multiplied."

1. *The love of God towards us.* Doubtless there are degrees of this. Some are more beloved of God than others. God admires and delights in some more than others. We see this in all ages. Hence Enoch and Abraham, and Moses and David. Hence Christ's regards were special towards John, and James, and Peter. He desires, that God may delight in you. That his love may be of the highest degree. Of the most copious abundance. Incessant in its manifestation. Transforming and satisfying. That God might rest in his love, &c.

2. *The love of saints towards God.* Ah! here is the great and lamentable deficiency.

“Our love to Him so faint, so cold,
His love to us so great.”

Now love to God is the very essence of christianity. The very life of piety. The very soul of religion. It should be ardent—increasing—supreme—constant,—and ever flowing with admiration and delight. He requires that we love Him with all our heart, &c. How we should desire and pray.

“Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,
With all thy quick’ning powers ;
And shed abroad a Saviour’s love,
And that shall kindle ours.”

3. *The love of believers towards one another, and towards all men.* The evidence of our love to God is to be seen in the unfeigned love we have to one another: Often this love is feeble, when it ought to be fervent. Often contracted, when it ought to be expanded. Often selfish, when it ought to be liberal, &c. It ought to be towards all saints,—and *in deed* and *in truth*. So also it should include all men. The ignorant and perishing. Our enemies, and the enemies of the Redeemer.

Let the subject,

1. *Lead to self-examination.* How do we stand in reference to mercy, peace, and love ?
2. *We should be concerned for their increase.*
3. *Labour to increase it,*—By faith and prayer, and devotedness to God.

THE CHARGE AGAINST THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS.

“Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”—*Rev.* ii. 4.

THE text is addressed to the Church of Christ at Ephesus. Ephesus was a celebrated city of Ionia, in Asia Minor, 45 miles S. E. of Smyrna, built on the side of a hill on the river Cayster, and about five miles from the sea. It was the principal mart, as well as the metropolis of the proconsular Asia, and was greatly renowned on account of its magnificent temple erected to Diana. The great apostle of the Gentiles visited this city when on his way to Jerusalem, Acts xviii. 19. He afterwards paid a second visit to it, and faithfully laboured in the Gospel of Christ for the space of two years. Here the Gospel effected mighty changes in the hearts and lives of many of the Ephesians. See Acts xix. 19, &c. To the church established here, the apostle addressed one of his most rich and interesting epistles about five years after he had preached the Gospel unto them. It was about thirty years after this that the beloved and holy John was expressly directed to make known to them the will of God, of which our text forms a part. Fervent religion had declined, a spirit of formalism prevailed, and hence the threatenings with which the address concludes. Long since has that threatening been put in execution. It is described now as being a mere heap of stones, and a few mud cottages without one Christian residing in it. Not only is the church of Christ extinct, but the once far-famed city of Ephesus is no more. Happy, if only the Christians of Ephesus could be

included in the charge of the text,—we fear its truths are applicable to some here—yea, to some in every Christian congregation. Let us then,

I. EXAMINE THE CHARGE MADE.

II. THE COUNSEL GIVEN. And,

III. THE THREATENING APPENDED.

I. THE CHARGE MADE. Observe, it is not licentiousness of conduct—corruption of doctrine—neglect of discipline. It is not the apostacy of the members of the church of Ephesus, but it is the declension of their spiritual affection, the loss of their first love.

(1) Now vital religion consists very essentially in love to Jesus Christ. Hence the Saviour's address to Peter. Hence the malediction, "If any man love not," &c. Hence the declaration, "God is love," &c.

(2) Now the first love of the Christian is usually very fervent and intense. "*First love.*" How ardent. How glowing. How cheerful. How self-denying. How influential. See it evinced in the spiritual and grateful conversation. See it in the earnest reading of the Word. See it in the early and regular attendance in the sanctuary. See it in the liberality and zeal for the cause of Christ. See it in the love of devotion, and meditation, in the closet, &c. Observe then,

(3) The loss of this *first love*. Not of all love. Not of esteem and confidence, &c., but this *first love*. How the picture I have drawn is reversed. Conversation less religious. Bible more neglected—prayer less regarded—ordinances less prized—liberality less exhibited—ministers less esteemed—the world, &c., more in favour, &c. Religion now more of duty and less of privilege—more of service, less of pleasure—more of constraint, less of choice. Ah, what says the Bible?—the closet,—the pew,—but more the conscience?

II. THE COUNSEL GIVEN.

1. *Meditative remembrance*, Remember from whence, &c.

Look back to your high, and holy, and blessed standing, Think of the period when ye were the inhabitants of the rock—elevated, distinguished, happy. A bright prospect of glory. And now in the desert, yea, in the maze—depressed, gloomy, &c. Remember and ponder well the subject.

2. *Repentance.* Change your minds. Return to your first views and feelings respecting your souls and Christ Jesus. Regret the change. Sorrow over the deterioration. Mourn over your backslidings, confess your sins. "Return unto the Lord," &c.

3. *A reperformance of first duties.* Begin as at first. Be diligent, lively, persevering, prayerful as at first. For Christ and his love, and his Gospel, and salvation, are now equally as precious. Now mark,

III. THE THREATENING APPENDED. This counsel neglected, God declares what he will do. "Remove the candlestick," &c. It is said that this admonition had a good effect. That they were awakened to fresh zeal, etc., but afterwards fell into the corruption which overspread the Christian world. The threatening is the extinction of the church. Christ forsaking it, etc. Then Ichabod, etc. Now this will equally apply to individual members. Christ will have the intense, fervent love of his people, or he will abandon his residence. Think of this, and remember how David prayed against it. "Cast me not," etc. If he departs, nothing will be left but dreariness, discomfort, despondency, apostacy, and ruin. "If thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." Let the subject then lead,

1. *To personal self-examination.* Does it address me? Am I the person? Oh, do this faithfully. In the light of God's word. With prayer for the Holy Spirit's assistance, etc. "O Lord, search me," etc.

2. *To a reconsecration of ourselves to God.* This is oftentimes necessary. Our condition is perilous. Temptations very numerous, etc.

3, *Let it urge to constant vigilance.* Be vigilant, etc. Let me urge this on young converts, etc. Live near to God. Cleave to the Lord. Give diligence, etc. Watch your lips. Be particular in your associates. Guard against the world. Trust not your own hearts. Exercise constant faith in Christ and earnest prayer, etc. Wait on the Lord, etc.

4. *Some never have loved Jesus Christ.* How ungrateful, base, dangerous. O reflect, repel, believe, etc.

GOD'S PRESENCE, THE SECURITY OF THE CHURCH.

“God *is* in the midst of her : she shall not be moved: God shall help her, *and that* right early.”—*Psalms* xli. 5.

THE penning of this Psalm, and the occurrence on which it was written, are alike unknown. But its spirit and meaning cannot be misunderstood. It is the triumphant song of the church of God, in the midst of enemies, perils, and revolutions. The language is very graphic—the similies bold, and the spirit noble, enterprising, and exulting. You are aware, I presume, it was one of Luther's favorite psalms. In his day, amidst the changes and commotions which surrounded him, he used to say, let us sing the 46th Psalm, &c. The text is applicable to the church of God in all ages, and never more so, than at the present crisis.

All ecclesiastical communities are in a state of excited activity. Abroad in the distant east, the ancient churches of those countries are in extreme commotion. In general the spirit of enquiry is arousing the myriads who had sunken down into the quiescence of popery. Our missionary stations are attacked not only by pagan priests, but by those of the

Roman hierarchy. At home the gross and superstitious spirit of the Tractarians, has threatened the overthrow of godliness in the episcopal communion. It is quite clear that human authority in matters of religion was never more feeble in its power; and the day is coming when all systems of religion will be brought to a fiery ordeal, and none but the spiritual and the pure shall come forth without loss and ruin. But of the true church we may confidently exclaim, "God is in the midst of her," &c.

Observe then,

I. The church to which the text will apply. And,

II. The declaration concerning it.

I. THE CHURCH TO WHICH THE TEXT WILL APPLY. Of course we believe that there is only one true church of God; and we equally believe that *no* section in the world has a right to that *title* exclusively. We say exclusively. Many may claim it. For instance, the Romish church does so most boldly. The Church of England, &c. But we believe the true church to consist of all true believers, in the Lord Jesus Christ, in every part of the world. We believe there are such in all religious communities. That no religious denomination has every mark of a true church. Excellencies and defects exist everywhere, and in every sect. But in the midst of all there is a true catholic church, constituted of all who love the Lord Jesus, &c. And it is to this true spiritual church, the text refers.

The church is an ark of many compartments. A house, having many rooms. A garden, with many beds. An army of many regiments. A tree of many branches. A body of many members. A building of many stones. A city of many streets. A kingdom of many towns. A flock of many sheep. The converted, regenerated, God-fearing, and God-serving of all communities, belong to the true church of God.

II. THE DECLARATION CONCERNING IT. The first relates,

1. *To the Divine presence.* The church is of Divine

formation, and God dwells in it. He says, "This is my rest;" "Mine eyes and my heart," &c. Wherever his people meet, &c. He is so,

(1) *By the power of His truth.* The church is the depository and garrison of the truth. The truth is the reflection of God's mind—the utterance of his heart. The diffusion of His effulgent light. Hence there is as much of God, as of pure unadulterated truth. He is present,

(2) *In the recognition of his ordinances.* God's ordinances are all symbolical of certain blessings and privileges. *Preaching* is the publishing of the glad news, and He is with the preaching of the gospel alway, &c. *Baptism* is the emblem of our regeneration, our spiritual death and resurrection with Christ, and He is there to accept the consecrated offering of body and spirit to his service. The *Lord's Supper* is the reflexion of the Paschal meal, and the symbol of the celestial banquet, and He is there to bless the provision of his house, &c. *Prayer* is the drawing nigh to God, and to such he is pledged to draw nigh.

(3) *By the residence of his spirit.* John xiv. 16, &c. xv. 28. The spirit is the life, and strength, and joy of the church,—its light, and hope, and glory. The other declaration relates,

2. *To the permanency of the church.* "She shall never be moved." Mark,—particular sects in their visible forms, &c., may decay and perish. The true church may be persecuted and oppressed, as in Egypt and Babylon. The early Christian church—the spiritual church in the valleys, of Piedmont—in France, &c. The primitive church in this kingdom. The missionary church in Tahiti, &c. Apostacies may exterminate churches from certain localities. As of the churches in the East, &c. Speculations and controversies may disturb and separate the members of the churches from each other; but still the true church of the

living God shall never be moved. Never rased—blotted out—destroyed. For this would,

(1.) *Falsify predictions.* The stability, and permanency, and progress, and glory of the church in the earth are the subject of prophetic testimony—"The mountain of the Lord's house," &c. "Her converts are to out number the drops of the dew," &c. All nations are to flow into her, &c. See Isa. lx. 18. "The kingdoms of this world," etc.

(2.) *It would violate promises.* Rich—numerous—express—repeated—precious promises. God has engaged "To watch it every moment." "To keep it day and night." To be its wall of fire and glory. To bless her friends, and confound her enemies.

(3.) *It would blight Messiah's expectations.* He has redeemed it—called it—chosen it—washed it—prays for it. Its glory,—Its joy,—Its prosperity are *His*. His *desire*. His *reward*. Isa. liii. 10.

(4.) *It would disappoint the hopes of the Redeemed.* God's people have ever identified their best interests with the church. They have lived—labored—suffered—and died for this—untold myriads in heaven—countless thousands on earth. The kingdom must come—truth shall triumph—the church shall be glorified.

APPLICATION.

1. *Are we members of the true church?* What an honor—privilege.

2. *Are we identified with its interests?* "If I forget," etc. "Pray for the peace," etc.

3. *It is our duty to labor, hope, and rejoice, &c.*

THE CHRISTIAN A NEW CREATURE.

(A New Year's Sketch.)

“Therefore if any man *be* in Christ *he* is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”—*2 Cor.* v. 17.

It is evident from Scripture that man does not come into the world a religious being. Neither is religion a something which takes possession of him as a matter of course. Nor is it necessarily imparted by parental instruction and example. The heart of man naturally is opposed to God. Far from God—unlike God. So that religion is a great and manifest revolution in the soul. The overthrow of Satan’s empire, and the establishment of the kingdom of God in the heart. It is being engrafted into Christ. It is the renovation of all the moral powers. It is the recovery of the lost, and it is life from the dead. Our text is exceedingly graphic and forcible. “If any be in Christ,” &c. Observe then,

I. THE NEW MORAL CREATION. And,

II. ITS UNMISTAKEABLE EVIDENCES.

I. THE NEW MORAL CREATION. This is partly described, *Eph.* ii. 10. Now in the moral creation, there are several resemblances to the Divine mode of operation in the creation of the world.

1. *It is effected by His word.* “He spake,” &c. “By the word of the Lord,” &c. So is it in the new creation. He effects the conversion of the soul by His word. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” Hence the children of God are born again of the incorruptible seed, even of the Word of God. Hence the

apostle says, "Our word came not into you," &c. "Ye shall know the truth," &c. The Divine word is the sword of the spirit by which he wounds, and it is the healing balm by which peace is whispered to the soul. As in the old creation,

2. *The first production is light.* The first mandate that disturbed the silence of untold ages was, "Let there be light!" So it is in the new creation. The work of grace begins by the opening of the eyes of the understanding. A sight of our sin and misery, and peril, and helplessness. And then a sight of God's love, Christ's merits, and the way of salvation by faith in his name. Ye who were some time darkness, are now *light*, &c. Children of the *day*, &c. As in the old creation,

3. *It is holy and good.* All God's works reflected his glory and declared his praise. "The heavens," &c. So this more especially. It is the renewal of the mind in the Divine likeness. A new heart is given, and a holy spirit. There is now order instead of confusion and chaos,—beauty instead of deformity,—righteousness instead of sin,—goodness instead of enmity and malevolence. There is the loveliness, docility, and sweetness of the little child. Now observe,

II. THE UNMISTAKEABLE EVIDENCES OF THIS NEW CREATION. Now the evidences are not equally striking and sudden. Some are moral and gentle by nature and habit. Then the process is exceedingly gradual, and almost imperceptible. Others profligate and abandoned, and the change is sudden and deeply marked. We may see this difference in Lydia and Saul. Still the evidences of conversion are represented in the text as being,

1. *Palpable.* Old things depart,—chaos, darkness, &c., pass away. Light and order, and beauty, are introduced. The desert and the thorn pass away. The garden and the fig-tree appear. The valley of dry bones pass away. The living army,—the host of God's elect, appear. The corpse,

and its corruption, and its putrescence, pass away,—and the living man appears.

2. *Universal*. “Old things.” The whole of them, and all things become new. This change extends the mind and its faculties,—all are *renewed*. To the heart, and its passions, all are changed. To the spirit, and its emotions, all are renovated. Then the change will be indicated in the conversation and daily walk. “All things,” &c. It is a change,

3. *Most admirable*. Hence the exclamation, Behold! It is worthy of the gaze and attention of all intellectual beings. God beholds, and promises his work to be good. The Saviour beholds, and sees of the travail of his soul, &c. The Spirit beholds, and takes up his abode in the hallowed temple of the new born Spirit. Angels behold, and there is joy, &c. The pious behold, and glorify God in them and over them. But let us enlarge on some points of this new creation,

(1.) There will be *new habits*. Who were his companions? Where did he spend his time? What was his reading? What the end of his life? Now, behold, they are all new.

(2.) There will be new *dispositions*. Formerly disposed to pride. Now to humility. To vanity and praise of men,—now the honour of God. Formerly avaricious,—now liberal. Formerly selfish,—now good and generous. “All things,” &c.

(3.) There will be new *tempers*. Some do think that religion will change every thing but the temper. If the temper be not changed, there is no religion. It is a delusion—a great egregious fallacy. There is that *angry* temper. There is that *wrathful* temper. There is that *sullen* temper. There is that *ungovernable*, &c. Are these evidences of religion? What a libel! What a farce! What a cheat! It is the religion of the devil of darkness and of perdition. Such Christians are a byword to scoffers—a curse to their

families—a stumbling-block to enquirers, and a reproach to religion. No! my text is true. “All things,” &c. There will be meekness. There will be mercy. There will be the lovely and the good reflected. There will be self-government.

(4.) There will be *new* purposes and designs. The natural man liveth to himself. He seeketh his own, &c. The new man seeks to glorify God. He desires and purposes to please Him. Whatsoever he does, &c. He liveth to the Lord, &c.

(5.) New expectations and hopes. Ask the careless about his destiny, &c. He is like a man in the dark. Or a mariner whose vessel is driven hither, &c. All is involved in perplexing uncertainty. The new creature is the subject of a Divine hope. Begotten again to a lively hope. He is looking for that blessed hope, &c. And this hope maketh not ashamed, &c. Finally,—new pleasures and joys. Those of old were the pleasures of sense, and sin—sensual, short-lived, followed by remorse and bitterness. Like the crackling of thorns, &c. The Christian’s pleasures are spiritual, heavenly, and divine. They are often unspeakable and full of glory. Yet they are but the drops from the eternal source. “For in thy presence,” &c.

APPLICATION.

1. To whom does the text apply? How exalted, blessed, and happy.

2. Who will seek this state on this day? It is attainable. Now, by all. On gracious terms. “To as many as received him,” &c.

3. This state is essential to eternal life. “Except a man be born again,” &c.

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH.

(A New Year's Sketch.)

“Therefore thus saith the Lord ; Behold, I wilt cast thee from off the face of the earth : this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord.”—*Jer.* xxviii. 16.

THE book of human destiny is in the keeping of Jehovah, and no man, however wise, can tell what to-morrow will bring forth. Ignorance of the future is one of the evidences of God's goodness to us, and care over us. To see clearly the page of our onward history, would often incapacitate alike for present duty and enjoyment. Yet we may indulge a little in probable conjecture. Supposing that book were handed to you, and you were allowed to peruse the records of the year on which you have entered. *One* would find that the record would be dark and ominous—a year's troubles and bereavements, and sorrows. *Another* would find that it would be a year of moral deterioration, and that his downward path would be rapid and fearful. *Another*, that continued procrastination had driven away the striving spirit, and that conscience would become callous and seared. *Another*, that his winding sheet and shroud were already woven, the wood of his coffin dry and ready, and he would see written in characters of terrific solemnity—“This year shalt thou die.” The text was spoken to a wicked, false prophet, (See v. 15,) and was carried into execution on the seventh month, ver. 17.

I reminded you before that in a congregation of this size, the annual mortality would be from ten to twelve persons. So that it would be next to a miracle if the text should not be realized in the history of many present.

Ought not the question to arise in every mind, "Lord, is it I?" Does the text belong to me? It is not for the preacher to say to whom it is applicable. But let us just consider, .

I. The grounds of probability of the text being realized in us. And,

II. The influence which even this probability should exert upon us.

I. THE GROUNDS OF PROBABILITY OF THE TEXT BEING REALIZED IN US.

1. *From the precarious tenure on which life is suspended.* No marvel that men should die. The wonder is that we should live. So many operations necessary to preserve life. Seeds of mortality sown in our mortal bodies. Often breathe the atmosphere of sickness and mortality.

"Our life contains a thousand springs,
And dies if one be gone :
Strange that a harp of thousand strings,
Should keep in tune so long."

One violent spasm might stop the heart. One fit of coughing may prevent respiration, or break a blood vessel. One little obstacle cause the blood to rush to the head and suffuse the brain. One small wound fester, inflame, and kill. One cold introduce the seeds of insidious consumption or fearful fever. Just think of these things, and do not wonder that we say, "This year you may die."

2. *From the events of the past.* How many died last year, who bade fair to live. Not only the aged and infirm, and afflicted and delicate,—but the hale and robust, and vigorous and active, and young. Many with bright prospects. In important stations. Ministers, philanthropists, statesmen, &c. Many of the most likely for life. Now such have been all past years, and this therefore will no doubt be the same, and form no exception to the rule.

3. *From the previous indications which afflictions have given you.* Some of you have suffered great afflictions during the past year. Had narrow hair-breadth escapes. Many loud warnings. Now these are designed to be subject matter for serious reflection. They proclaim your mortality, and remind you that this year *you may die*. To many this probably is increased,

4. *From the evidences of old age and decay.* What says that feebleness—that paralyzed trembling—that hesitation of gait—dimness of sight, and other infirmities of the senses. Others may go before you, the sun may go down at noon day, but it must at evening. The night is surely approaching, which to you must be the night of death.

II. THE INFLUENCE WHICH THIS PROBABILITY OF DEATH SHOULD EXERT UPON US.

1. *Should it not lead to solemn enquiry?* We ask,

(1) What is death? The extinction of animal life. The cessation of existence on the earth. The separation of body and soul. The return of the body to the dust.

(2) From what does it remove us? From the world in which we live. From the society of friends, &c. From the Christian sanctuary and the means of grace. From the field of hope. From the sphere of gospel mercy.

(3) To what does death introduce us? Into the immediate presence of God. And thence to heaven or hell,—glory or perdition. To the society of the beatified, or to the company and regions of the lost.

2. *Should it not lead us to reflection?* Two questions of importance.

(1) Am I fit to die? Is sin forgiven? Have I a new heart? Have I a title to eternal life?

(2) Am I preparing to die? There is an evangelical fitness, and a spiritual readiness. Both necessary. Are my worldly affairs in an orderly, settled state? Do I often think

of death? Pray in reference to it? Watch, that I may not be surprized? Be ye therefore ready, &c.

3. *Should it not lead us to activity?* When there is much to be done, and a small amount of time for doing it, activity is especially important! Two passages:—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth," &c. "I must work while it is day," &c. What claims there are on me? Family.—Church of Christ. The world! My talents, time, and wealth are God's, &c. It is the Christian's glory to die in the field of labour. Working for God and eternity, &c. Surely no time for idleness and trifling.

APPLICATION.

1. *To the unconverted.* How awful if you should die, &c. I beseech you consider,—repent. Flee to Christ. Do so this very evening. Delay not—for behold, the Judge may be even at the door.

2. *To the young of this congregation.* Do not think the text is of no importance to you. This year may be your last. Several young persons have died from our midst the last year. Religion will make you fit for life and ready for death.

3. *To those who fear God.* If the text should be realized in your experience, that passage will be fulfilled—"Better is the day of a man's death," &c. Then it will be farewell trials, sorrows, enemies, temptations, sins. Welcome purity,—glory, the rapturous vision, eternal life. Oh, think of the subject and exemplify, as well as utter the wish—"Let me die the death of the righteous," &c.

REMEMBRANCE OF CHRIST.

“We will remember thy love.”—*Solomon’s Song* i. 4.

A GREAT deal is said in the Scriptures concerning the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed it may be said to be the very essence and glory of the Gospel. Take it away, and we have no good news for the sinner—no glad tidings for a perishing world. Take it away, and all before us is dark and dreary, and hopeless—and all above us, awful and appalling. Take it away, and you leave man without a remedy for his guilt, misery, and condemnation. Every where, however, this subject animates the sacred writers. The patriarchs advert to this. Abraham saw the day of Christ and rejoiced, and was glad. David never was so exhilarated as when he was writing the things concerning the King,—then indeed his tongue was as the pen, &c. How Isaiah and most of the prophets testified of Christ, time will not allow me to detail. Our text is the language of the church, figuratively described in this book as the spouse of the Redeemer, who exclaims—“We will remember,” &c. We ask,

I. What are the peculiarities of Christ’s love, that we will remember,

II. The nature of the remembrance we will maintain.
And,

III. The influence which this remembrance will exert.

I. WHAT ARE THE PECULIARITIES OF CHRIST’S LOVE, THAT WE WILL REMEMBER. We ought affectionately to remember the love of friends and benefactors. The love of parents, especially the love of our pious and devoted mothers. It is base and ungrateful to forget ordinary exhibitions of

kindness and love. If so, how striking does the love of the Lord Jesus stand out towards us in the Gospel.

1. *In the eternity of its origin.* The love of Christ is seen on the cross—in the garden—during his whole life: but they were the flowing streams—where was the fountain? Go back to paradise, and you find it not there. No! before all time it existed in his purposes,—in his resolves,—in his designs,—which then comprehended the salvation of our race. See Eph. i. 4. “I have loved thee with an everlasting love,” &c.

2. *In the freeness of its nature.* Was the love of Christ a mere drop—a mere ray? Oh, no! it was a stream deep and wide, and overflowing. The winds of the heavens are not more free. The waves of the sea, &c. It was the spontaneous tide of his own goodness setting in on our world, and rolling its billows of mercy on our desolated earth.

3. *In the worthlessness of its objects.* Men seek for fitness, and worth, and excellency in the object of their affections. We love the beautiful, the intelligent, the good, the amiable! Had the love of Christ been thus regulated, it never would have fixed its regards on sinful men. Instead of beauty, there was the disgusting loathsomeness of depravity. Instead of intelligence, there was gross ignorance. Instead of goodness, there was enmity and unholiness. Instead of the amiable, there was the carnal—the malevolent—the diabolical. Yet on beings so unlovely, did he set his heart's affections, &c.

4. *In the sacrifices of its communication.* To love an unlovely object is surprising; but to do so at much inconvenience, loss and suffering, is still more marvellous. Yet so did Christ. To render his love available he must remove the difficulties, take away the obstacles, pay the penalty. The objects, &c. were enslaved—he must redeem. They were guilty—he must atone. They were polluted—he must cleanse. Satan held them in fetters—he must burst the

bonds. Deity in his holy nature, was bound to punish—he must become the surety. They were carnal, and haters of God—he must renew and change the heart. He did all this. He descended from heaven. Became a child, &c. Man of sorrows,—poor,—persecuted,—condemned,—crucified, &c. Laid down his life.

“ See there my Lord upon the tree,” &c.

5. *In the graciousness of its application.* We have been speaking of the love of Christ for us; but see it also manifested to us, in the overtures of the Gospel. Suing for a place in our souls. Overcoming our enmity,—captivating our hearts, &c. How gentle, tender, condescending, the love of Christ to us.

6. *In its unchangeable constancy.* His love is not only intense, but abiding. Eternal as to the past, and perpetual as to the future. Often fervent affection is fickle, and speedily cools. Christ's is immutable. And think of its constancy in the midst of our changes and departures, and sins. All this is wondrous. Well may we say—“ We will remember,” &c.

II. THE NATURE OF THE REMEMBRANCE.

1. *It should be affectionate and reciprocal.* We love him, &c. We should remember to exhibit ours. To testify our grateful feelings, &c.

2. *It should be practical.* A religion that influences our conversation and spiritual condition. If any man love me, he will keep my words. “ If ye love me,” &c.

3. *It should be reflective.* Christ's love to us and in us, should be reflected to those around us. If Christ so loved us, we should also love one another. Love to his people, &c. Love to the wretched, &c. Love to the world. Love to our enemies. Oh, remember to *reflect it*. Be so many mirrors of the love of Christ. “ By this shall all,” &c.

4. *It should be abiding.* A subject never to be forgotten.

Daily, hourly remembrance. But there are especial seasons. In the closet. In reading the Word. In the sanctuary. Especially at the Lord's table. May it be in the dying hour, then it will be in the day of judgment and through all eternity.

III. THE INFLUENCE, THE REMEMBRANCE OF CHRIST'S LOVE WILL EXERT.

1. *It will destroy the love of sin.*
 2. *It will moderate the love of self.* "I am crucified," &c.
 3. *It will wean from the love of the world.*
 4. *It will transform into the lovely image of Christ.*
- Feel and think, and speak, and labour as did Christ.

APPLICATION.

1. Some do remember Christ's love.
2. Some care nothing for it.
3. We trust there are some desirous of loving Him.

FAULTS REMEMBERED.

“Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day.”—*Gen.* xli. 9.

ALL persons who are familiar with the history of Joseph, will remember the consequence of his interpreting the dreams of the chief butler and baker. And how he applied to the chief butler that he would employ his influence on his behalf, *Gen.* xl. 12, &c. Full of gratitude to the Hebrew youth, no doubt he promised to intercede for him, and most probably intended to fulfil the promise. But with the return of his own prosperity he forgot the prisoner: hence it is written, ver. 23. At length, Divine providence, which was watching over the interests of Joseph, caused Pharaoh, the Egyptian monarch, to dream, &c. The magicians, &c. could not interpret, &c., ver. 8. It was thus that the chief butler was reminded of his youthful fellow-prisoner, and he exclaimed—“I do remember,” &c. We observe,

I. THE BEST MEN HAVE THEIR FAULTS. By faults, we mean things that are wrong, morally so. There is not a just man on earth,—that doeth good and sinneth not. There are none really, perfectly righteous—no, not one. But even very excellent persons have their faults. If you look at it as a matter of *history*. How we are reminded of this in the lives of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, Peter. The beloved John, &c.

1. *Some have faults of temper.* Irritable,—soon angry or morose, and a tendency to sullenness.

2. *Some have faults of spirit.* In one, pride is not annihilated. In another, vanity. In a third, pettishness.

Jealousy is the plague of some, and envy the torment of others.

3. *Others have faults of the tongue.* Talkativeness. Jestings. Speaking of others. Censoriousness, and sometimes backbiting. A man who offends not in tongue is a perfect man.

4. *In others there are faults of character.* Instability,—frequent relapses into evil. Formality. Worldliness. An uneven, chequered Christian course. The faults which distinguish even the good, include,

(1) Faults against God in the serious reverential love, or obedience.

(2) Faults against our own souls in negligence of the means,—living at a distance from God. Neglect of self-cultivation, &c.

(3) Faults against mankind. In unkindness, want of sympathy, mercy, goodness, &c.

II. WE ARE APT TO BE IGNORANT OF OUR FAULTS. We know a great deal about others. We see the faults of this or that person; but, alas! our own are often buried in selfish ignorance.

(1) This arises from too great an estimation of ourselves. Often warned against this. Great peril in this.

(2) From want of self-examination. Without this we cannot know ourselves. Examine, &c. Prove your own selves.

(3) From being absorbed in the affairs of this life. We know much of our business affairs. Much of the world, &c., but how really little of ourselves, and especially of our faults.

III. GOD SOMETIMES BRINGS THE FAULTS OF MEN INTO STRIKING REMEMBRANCE. Thus in the text. Thus also in the case of Joseph's brethren, Gen. xlii. 21. Thus also in the case of Belshazzar, Dan. v. 1—7. Thus the woman of Samaria, by the conversation of Christ. This is

one great design of the ministry of the Word. Hear what is said of it, Heb. iv. 12. So the preaching of Paul before Felix. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. So it has often been. It is a mercy when this revelation is made in this world. For in the great day, God will bring every work, &c.

IV. WHEN FAULTS ARE REMEMBERED THEY SHOULD BE CONFESSED AND FORSAKEN. Confession always to God. This he requires. "He that confesseth," &c. "If we confess," &c. And in many cases confession to men. If we have injured, &c., it is our duty and privilege.—It is the way of comfort and real dignity. Nothing ignoble in it. Thus the butler. Sincere confession will be accompanied by reformation. The abandonment of the sin, restitution to our fellow-men. This is much neglected, yet an essential, of acceptable saving religion. I notice,

V. FAULTS CONFESSED AND FORSAKEN SHALL ASSUREDLY BE FORGIVEN. This is the peculiar doctrine of the Gospel. The Law knew nothing of it. And forgiveness thus comes to us through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not for the sake of the confession and amendment. God pardons sin for his name's sake. But the blessing of forgiveness is certain to every one who comes to Him through his Son.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let the subject lead to serious self-examination.* How many faults lie forgotten. O, explore! bring them to the light, confess, and seek mercy.

2. *Unconfessed faults will meet us at the last day.* When the books are opened, &c.

INDEX TO THE TEXTS AND SUBJECTS.

TEXT.	SUBJECT.	PAGE.
Genesis xli. 9	Faults Remembered - -	- 314
Exodus xv. 54, 55	The Waters of Marah - -	- 250
Psalms xlvi. 5	God's presence, the security of the church	298
cxxxii. 18	Messiah's Triumphs - -	- 230
Proverbs xiii. 6	Ruinous Effects of Sin - -	- 259
Solomon's Song i. 4	Remembrance of Christ - -	- 310
Isaiah xxv. 6, 8	The Great Feast - -	- 230
xxxviii. 19	Praises of the Living - -	- 249
Jeremiah xxvii. 16.	The Sentence of Death - -	- 306
Matt. iv. 23—24	Miracles performed in Galilee - -	- 136
vii. 24—27	The Wise and Foolish Builders - -	- 13
viii. 1—4	The Leper Cleansed - -	- 159
viii. 28—34	The Restored Demoniacs - -	- 163
viii. 23—27	Christ's power over the Winds and the Sea	183
ix. 1—8	Restoring of the Paralytic - -	- 140
ix. 18	Recovery of Jairus' Daughter - -	- 195
ix. 33—36	The Dumb Spirit Cast Out - -	- 171
xii. 10—11	Restoration of the Withered Hand - -	- 192
xiii. 34	Christ's Parabolical Mode of Teaching - -	- 9
xiii. 3—9	The Sower - - - -	- 16
xiii. 24	The Wheat and Tares - - - -	- 20
xiii. 31—32	The Grain of Mustard Seed - - - -	- 24
xiii. 33	The Leaven - - - -	- 27
xiii. 44	The Hidden Treasure - - - -	- 31
xiii. 47—50	The Net - - - -	- 45
xiii. 45—46	The Pearl of Great Price - - - -	- 77
xiv. 15—21	The Loaves and Fishes - - - -	- 148
xviii. 23—25	The Debtors - - - -	- 42
xx. 1—15	The Day Labourers - - - -	- 49
xx. 29—34	The Two Blind Men - - - -	- 167
xxi. 28—31	The Two Sons - - - -	- 38
xxi. 33—43	The Wicked Husbandman - - - -	- 74
xxv. 1—13	The Wise and Foolish Virgins - - - -	- 80
xxv. 14—30	The Talents - - - -	- 84
xxvi. 51—54	Healing of Malchus' Ear - - - -	- 216
xxvii. 45—51	Miracles accompanying the Crucifixion - - - -	- 220
Mark vii. 32	Cure of the Deaf Man - - - -	- 185
viii. 34	Saving Religion, a Religion of Self-Denial - - - -	- 277

INDEX.

TEXT.	SUBJECT.	PAGE.
ix. 17—27	Casting out the Dumb Spirit -	- 144
xiii. 34	All Christians should work for God	- 233
Luke iv. 33—37	The Expulsion of the Unclean Spirit	- 174
vii. 1—7	The Centurion's Servant -	- 178
vii. 11—17	Restoration of the Widow's Son -	- 198
vii. 40—42	The Merciful Creditor - -	- 117
x. 30—37	The Good Samaritan - -	- 113
xii. 16—21	The Rich Fool - - -	- 91
xiii. 6—9	The Barren Fig Tree - -	- 94
xiv. 1—8	The Unjust Steward - -	- 87
xiv. 16—24	The Great Supper - - -	- 70
xvi. 19—22	Rich Man and Lazarus - -	- 99
xvi. 23—31	Rich Man and Lazarus - -	- 120
xv. 3—7	The Lost Sheep - - -	- 52
xv. 11—17	The Prodigal Son - - -	- 56
xv. 17—20	The Prodigal Son - - -	- 59
xv. 20—32	The Prodigal Son - - -	- 63
xvii. 7—10	The Unprofitable Servant -	- 67
xvii. 17	The Ten Lepers - - -	- 212
xviii. 1—8	The Unjust Judge - - -	- 105
xviii. 10—14	The Pharisee and Publican -	- 109
John ii. 1—11	Marriage of Cana - - -	- 133
iv. 39—42	Faith of the Samaritan - -	- 246
iv. 46—54	Healing of the Nobleman's Son -	- 155
v. 2—9	Bethesda Pool - - -	- 152
ix. 1—7	Restoring of the Blind Young Man	- 182
x. 1—18	The Good Shepherd - - -	- 125
x. 11—18	The Good Shepherd - - -	- 121
xi. 11	Death of Lazarus, the Friend of Christ	- 202
xi. 35	Christ Weep at the Grave of Lazarus	- 206
xi. 36—46	Resurrection of Lazarus -	- 209
xiv. 21	Saving Religion, a Religion of Obedience	- 273
xix. 21	Blessedness of the Christian Sabbath	- 250
Acts ii. 22	The Miraculous Power of Christ	- 129
Romans iv. 16	Saving Religion a Religion of Faith	- 264
xii. 12.	Saving Religion, a Religion of Prayer	- 281
1 Corinthians xiii 13	The Pre-eminence of Charity -	- 286
2 Corinthians v. 17	The Christian a New Creature -	- 302
Galatians i. 15, 16	The Proud Abased and Lowly Exalted	- 229
1 Peter ii. 5	Saving Religion, Spiritual in its Nature	- 260
1 John iv. 16	Saving Religion, a Religion of Love	- 269
Jude 2	Jude's Prayer for the Saints	- 291
Revelations ii. 4	The Charge against the Church at Ephesus	295

